# The Farmer and the Lord

George H. Hepworth

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# THE FARMER AND THE LORD

BY

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# THE FARMER AND THE LORD.

## I.

*CHAT BY THE WAYSIDE.*

"Now look here, Rastus Brown, don't talk any meracles to me, for I don't believe in 'em."

"There isn't any harm in talkin', Lije, is there?"

"Not if you talk sense, there isn't. But when you get to ramblin' round after meracles you won't find anythin' more than my son Sam did when he went gunnin' for ducks in August."

"He didn't get none, eh?"

"No, and 'cos there wasn't any. 'Tain't the

season when they fly in these parts. And there ain't any more meracles at any time of the year than there is ducks in summer, I reckon."

"Mebbe, Lijah; but your Sam knew pretty well that there was such things as ducks somewhere, or he wouldn't have wasted time tryin' to find 'em. He made a mistake in lookin' for 'em in the wrong place, that's all."

"Yes, and I jedge that your meracles is about as scarce as Sam's ducks. What I can see I believe, but what I can't see I don't know nothin' about. That's a pretty short creed, but it has sarved my purpose so far. I don't play hide-and-seek with my eyes shut."

"You always was a peculiar fellow, Lije, and I can't quite see through you."

"Wall, I don't set up to be winder-glass, Rastus."

"Now you wouldn't cheat a man in a horse trade, even if you had a chance."

"Some of you church folks would," sneered Lije.

"And I can't see how you get along without believin' as other folks do."

"Wall, I've reared a tidy family, Rastus, and the old farm pays about as well as most of 'em."

"Yes, but you ain't got no futur', Lije."

"What do I want of a futur', Rastus?—specially if there isn't any."

"Yes, you've got money in the bank, I allow, and your children are strong and healthy. But what are you goin' to do, Lije, bimeby?"

"Guess I'll have to chance it, same as you will."

"Supposin' that Sam was to be took, what then?"

"Don't worry about Sam, Rastus, and don't draw picters of that kind. My father give me a good body, and I give the same to Sam. He's a robustious boy, and his muscle is just like steel."

"All right, but supposin'—"

"Oh, I ain't in the business of supposin'. I've got somethin' better to do."

"I was only thinkin', Lije, that it is a good thing to have somethin' to tie to when there's trouble, 'cos if you don't you're just like thistle-down in a gale of wind.'

"I'd rather believe nothin' than believe what isn't so, Rastus, as you do."

"If it isn't so, why, then, you ought not to believe it; but p'r'aps 'tis so, and you may be mistook. You remember Silas Timber, don't you?"

"Wall, what of him?"

"He went out to Montany, or somewhere, prospectin'. He was goin' to get his pockets full of gold. Up in the mountains, one day, he and his partner was peerin' about, when the other fellow said: 'Silas, there's gold under our feet as true as you live; I can see the signs.' But Silas he knew more'n any one else, and he vowed there wasn't any gold there. He didn't see any signs, 'cos he didn't know a sign from a jack-knife."

"I've heerd about that," and Lije chuckled.

"So Silas bid his partner good-mornin', and trudged along. And what was the consequence?"

"Tell it yourself, Rastus; 'tisn't my story."

"If I recollect, the partner staked his claim, and got out of it all the gold he wanted. As for Silas—"

"Well," broke in Lije, "Silas is hammerin' hot iron in the blacksmith's shop at the Corners at a dollar a day, and serves him right."

"That's just it, Lije. And you are hammerin' cold iron, and not makin' much out of it, either."

"You're gettin' rather personal, Rastus," and Lije grew red in the face. "I haven't done anythin' of the kind."

"The gold was there, right under Silas's feet," continued Rastus, "but he didn't see it; and here's a good many things, close by you, that you ought to believe in, but you don't re-cog-nize 'em."

And now let me interrupt this conversation a

few minutes while I describe the persons engaged in it.

That the two were of the country folk is plain. That they belonged to the New England type is shown by their dialect, for in no other section of the country is this peculiar mode of speech found. They both knew how to think, though they couldn't express their thoughts in grammatical phrases.

Erastus Brown was what in these days would be called a broad Christian. Some of the church officials thought he was just a bit astray, theologically, but I knew him for years, and it always seemed to me that if the dear Lord were to visit Woodbine, He would sup with Rastus as He did with the little family at Bethany. He was as straight in his life as he was in his physique—a man six feet three in his stockings, clear-headed, clear-eyed, and pure-hearted. Rather brusk in expressing an opinion, he was apt to say things which were remembered; and even now, after a lapse of many years, and

though he has been in heaven for a full decade, his quaint sayings are frequently repeated.

"You can cheat yourself, and you can cheat other people," he said on one occasion, "but you can't get up early enough to cheat the Lord." And if you were to talk with a Woodbine farmer for half an hour, you would probably hear that sentence, and Rastus would be credited as its author.

"There are a good many snags in a man's life," he said to me one day, just before I went to college, "and you've got to get round 'em the best way you can. I notice that the boats on the Mississippi don't butt ag'in' 'em if they can help it. When you see one ahead of you, do as the priest and the Levite did: cross over, and go along on the other side."

Again, "You can get sweetenin' out of a pizen blossom, if you know as much as the bees do; and a man that isn't better'n a bumblebee isn't fit for the kingdom of heaven."

There is one other of his sayings which you

will hear, and it is worth quoting here. The man who kept the corner grocery was supposed to be very pious, but it was dangerous to make a swap with him of any article you had for sale. Rastus remarked in his hearing, and there was a queer twinkle in his eye: "It isn't talkin' that gets you into heaven; it's doin'." Then he added: "The Lord doesn't weigh a man's possessions. You can't put nothin' on the heavenly scales that isn't clean and honest and aboveboard."

There is a slate-stone slab at the head of a grave in the churchyard behind John Jessig's church, and under the name of Erastus Brown John had these words inscribed:

*"He lived as he believed."*

Elijah Tomkins was in some respects a different sort of man. His head was as square as a cube, indicating great obstinacy of purpose. He had the high cheek-bones of his race, but a couple of blue eyes, eyes that were deeply, darkly, beautifully blue, like a New England

sky in December, and they looked you straight in the face. One glance at his firm lower jaw, hardly concealed by the sparse whiskers, which looked like a hedge of scrub-oak, would convince you that he had opinions of his own, and was not afraid of them.

He inherited his infidelity not from his father alone, but from his grandfather, and the inheritance was a pretty large one. Mr. Huxley had to invent a word to cover his own case; for when his friends asked him if he believed in God or in immortality, he flew to the Greek dictionary and dragged from it a couple of roots which he put together, making the word "agnostic." Thereafter he spoke of himself as an agnostic, or a man who is willing to admit that you may be right or you may be wrong in your belief, but, for himself, he doesn't know anything about it. In the days of Lije's father and grandfather this convenient word had not come into use. They didn't say, "I don't know whether it is so or not, and I can't find out, so

I never give myself any trouble about the matter"—not they. They were altogether too blunt, too undiplomatic for that. They insisted that they did know something about God and immortality, all that it was possible to know, in fact, and that the statements of Christians were wholly false. There was no hiding behind the fence of agnosticism, or I-don't-know-ism, in those times, but a man flatly denied everything, and defended his denial against all comers.

There is a legend that Lije's ancestor had a theological tussle with the preacher one day. After listening to an argument on predestination, he is recorded as saying, "Parson, ar'n't you makin' God rather small and narrer? Seems to me, if I believed in Him, I wouldn't kind of hedge Him in, as you're doin', but I'd give Him all the room there is for the exercise of charity to poor human bein's." The criticism flew round the country neighborhood, and his fellow-farmers avoided him more sedulously than ever. He took no note of it, but simply

remarked, "My opinion for me, and your opinion for you. That's fair, isn't it?" and went about his work as usual.

That is the stock from which Lije came. He was apparently so made that he couldn't believe as others did. The whole trend of his mind was the other way. But his life was better than his creed. He exercised the Christian virtues, but didn't know they were Christian. Indeed, in his rough way he was punctiliously honorable, for if he told you he would pay a certain debt on a given day three months ahead, he would do it as surely as the sun rose.

Yes, he was sharp at a bargain, but I never knew a straightforward man who was not. He traded for the purpose of getting a profit from the trade, but he was what the villagers called a square man. And, moreover, he was a broad-minded and just man, with a dash of charity in his judgment. One day a very hot rivalry burst forth between two churches, and some rough things were said on both sides. To one

of the deacons he quietly remarked: "Well, there isn't much of an inducement to jine either of them churches, if I happened to be thinkin' of doin' so, is there? 'Pears to me that if you're follerin' your Master, you're so far behind Him that you're clean out of sight;" and he said it so good-naturedly that no offense could be taken.

I speak of him thus in detail because I propose to follow his fortunes, and to tell you of the remarkable effect which certain incidents produced in his character.

Rastus and Lije were intimate friends. In their boyhood they went together to the same school-house at the corner, trudging through a mile of snow during the winter months. The same birch rod had fallen on both their backs, and the same ferule had made the palms of their hands as red as a bit of sunset. They were manly youngsters, who shared their lunch with each other at recess, and when school was out fought side by side in boyish battles.

"He can't see the stars," said Rastus, when speaking of his friend to me, "and I'm sorry for it; but he's a good neighbor, and I guess the Lord won't be too hard on him. If a man lights his taller candle in the dark, he can't see as much as though the sun was shinin', but he can see somethin'. He'll die sometime, and the day after the funeral he'll know a good deal more'n he does now."

When my story opens Rastus was plowing, and Lije was leaning against the stone wall, doggedly whittling a stick. Now the peculiarity of a New England whittler is that when he is in a conciliatory mood he whittles toward himself, with his thumb on the whittled end of the stick; but when he is defiant he whittles away from himself, making the splinters fly. You may judge from the conversation which I have already reported that Lije's jack-knife was doing rather vigorous work. He was in no amiable state of mind. One of the ministers on the Sunday previous had made some remarks

which seemed to be unnecessarily personal, and Lije had become militant.

"Sometimes I think," he said, as he drew his hard thumb across the blade of his knife—"sometimes I think I don't believe in nothin'. 'Tany rate, you can't be sure of nothin'."

"Yes, you do, Lije," and Rastus leaned against his plow-handles, and looked his friend in the face.

"You know more 'bout it than I do, do you?"

"Yes, I reckon I do."

"And I reckon you don't, Rastus."

"Say, Lije, don't you believe in the good old mother that borned you, and whose last days you blessed with every comfort you could give her?"

"That's like askin' me if I'm human, isn't it?"

"And don't you believe in Samanthy, that you married nigh thirty years ago, and who's been a good wife to you ever since?"

"Rastus, are you wild? What's that got to do with it?"

"And don't you believe that the world is progressin', and every man ought to shove it along, and that it'll come out all right in the end, and that you and I ought to be marciful to man and beast, and that if we can lend a helpin' hand anywhere, we're bound to do it?"

"I can't see what you're drivin' at, Rastus." But he did see, and he stooped to pick up another stick to whittle.

"And don't you believe that it wouldn't be no harm to follow the Lord, and do pretty much as He did, forgivin' and forbearin', and all that sort of thing?"

"What's the meanin' of all this, Rastus? Do you take me for a heathen?"

"No, 'cos I know you're not one, Lije. But I want to show you that when you say you don't believe nothin' you are overstatin' the case. You believe pretty nigh onto everythin'

that other people believe, only you draw the line just this side of the church."

"And you think," sneered Lije, "that 'cos I don't swaller your creed I'm goin' to perdition, eh? That's the kind of charity you hev, and the kind of marcy you folks show."

"Hold up there, Lije; I don't go as far as that, and you know it. Do you remember that one day a scribe come to Jesus to have a talk about what is essential in religion, and the Lord said that love to God and love to your neighbor was about all any one could properly attend to?"

"Wal', yes; I've heerd somethin' of the kind."

"And when the man remarked that in his opinion them two commandments was the greatest things in the world, the Lord turned on him and said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God?' Now, Lije, you are like that scribe: you're not far off."

"Mebbe," answered Lije, "and then ag'in

mebbe not. I ain't sartin about nothin' except that I don't know nothin'. There's lots of things I don't believe, and I'm not goin' to say I do. You say you believe in God; well, I don't, and that's the end so far as I am concerned. And you believe in a futur'; but you've never been there, and no one's ever come from there. And you do a good deal of prayin', and what is it anyhow? The parson turns his face up to the ceilin' and begins to tell some one he can't see what he ought to do, and how a good many things is wrong and he'd like to have him set 'em right. I don't see no sense in it."

Rastus was greatly troubled in his mind. He had heard Lije say the same things many times, but now there was a kind of fierceness in his voice which seemed to be defiant, and he hardly knew what to make of it.

"I reckon," Lije continued—"I reckon, and I'll bet a cooky on it, that if you was hauled up before a church council, you'd come off

pretty slim, for you're not afeard of your opinions any more'n I am."

"We won't talk about that, Lije. It's neither here nor there, whether I come up to the regulation standard in all partic'lars or not; but I believe more'n you do, and I wouldn't give it up for the best farm in the county."

"Wall, Rastus, tell me honest what you do believe."

"Just wait till I plow another furrer round this field, and think about it. Keep on whittlin' till I come back, will you?—Get up there, Molly! High, Patsy, boy!"

Rastus struck the helve of his plow into the sod, and the rich loam groaned as it was turned over. He was gone not more than five minutes. "Whoa!" and he left the plow and faced Lije.

"Are you ready to hear me?" he asked.

"Fire ahead; I'm listenin'," was the answer.

"I ain't much at an argyment, Lije, and you can throw me every time."

Lije was somewhat mollified by the compli-

ment, and with a sly twinkle he answered, "Just as I did when we was boys and had a wrastlin'-match."

"Yes, you throwed me, but throwin' me didn't prove that you were in the right. Guess you see that, don't you?"

"P'r'aps."

"But if you're in 'arnest, and want a statement of my belief, you can have it."

"All right, Rastus."

"In the first place, I believe in a superintendin' Providence that's over all creation. I don't expect that this 'ere dandelion could grow unless it was told to, and it's Him that told it to who looks after affairs generally, includin' you and me. I don't pretend that I know much about Him. I only know that He kinder pervades me. That's where I begin, and it's a pretty big beginnin'."

"Yes, you begin with what you don't know for sure, just as I expected."

"That isn't so certain, Lije. T'other night I

was in the parlor, and it was dark as your pocket. I sat down on the sofy for a minute, and then I felt confident that there was somebody in the room."

"Heard his feet shuffle, of course."

"No, I didn't. I didn't hear a sound. But somehow or other I sensed another person, and if you was to ask me why, I couldn't tell you. Bimeby I said, quiet like, 'Is anybody here?' and Sam burst out laughin'. 'I see you come in, father,' he said, 'but I thought I'd keep still and pry on you.'"

"That argyment isn't worth shucks. If that's all you've got to say, your belief has a pretty slim foundation, and it had better get somethin' stronger to stand on. Howsomever, proceed to the next p'int."

"Wall, my idea is that heaven and earth can't be very far apart, and them that's gone know what we're doin' and help us do it."

"Where is this heaven you're talkin' about, Rastus? Seems to me you're wadin' through a

bog and will come out nowhere. That's about where I am, and you only think you're somewhere else, but you ain't."

"I can't put my finger on the map and say its' here or there, but it's bound to be somewhere."

"Isn't that sorter dim?" and Lije looked at Rastus through the corners of his eyes.

"Don't seem to me so, Lije. I lost that little fellow of mine, you remember, two year ago, and it 'most broke our hearts to home. I didn't see how I could stand it, and as for Tildy, you know how she went round the house with tears runnin' down her cheeks like a spring freshet; for you was there every day, and a mighty good friend you was, though you couldn't say much that was comfortin'. Still Tildy remarked to me one day, 'Lije's hand-shake, though he don't open his lips, is worth more'n some people's talk.'"

"Don't speak of that, Rastus. We was boys together, you know, and I couldn't help bein' neighborly, that's all."

"After a while," continued Rastus, "I thought I'd go to the village and see if Parson Jessig could do anythin' for Tildy, and he come right up here and stayed to supper."

"Why didn't you go to your own minister, at the Corners?"

"Don't know why, Lije. Guess 'twas a special providence. At any rate, I struck the right man. He come to the house several times, and he told us a lot of things we'd never thought of."

"Sich as what?" asked Lije.

"Well, for one thing, he said that whenever Christ got into trouble the angels came and helped Him out of it. That was a part of Scripter I had skipped over, but the parson seemed to think it was rather important."

"H'm!" sneered Lije.

"Then ag'in, he referred to the cloud of witnesses that Paul talks about. And after a while he said quietly, 'Who do you suppose was in that cloud of witnesses?'

"'I can't even guess,' says I, for I didn't see his drift.

"'Did you ever think,' says he, 'that you can't read much of the Bible without findin' that somebody up there is always comin' down here to do good?'

"'I never thought of it in that light,' says I; 'it's a new idea.'

"'Well,' says he, 'you needn't give up lovin' Billy, for he hasn't give up lovin' you, that's sartin. He's in heaven, but how nigh that is to the farm, and the dear mother there, no one can tell; but in my judgment B lly is close enough to see what's goin' on; and if so, he's sorry to see you mourn as those who have no hope.' That is what Parson Jessig said, and I've never forgot it."

Rastus was visibly affected. The memories of other days rushed into his mind, and, unless I am mistaken, there was moisture in his eyes. As for Lije, he had a warm, tender heart, and though it would have been impossible for him

to shed a tear, he kept profoundly silent, neither shrugging his shoulders nor otherwise expressing his dissent.

Rastus couldn't trust himself to speak further at the moment; so he said, in a broken sort of way, "Lije, I want to ask you a question, and I want a square answer; but just wait till I plow another furrer round the field, and then I'll be all right."

The sun was slanting to the westward, and the breeze made soft music in the near-by trees. There were clouds in the sky, but they floated lightly, and seemed to give good cheer to the scene. It was a pretty picture—Rastus walking slowly behind his plow, his thoughts far away, and Lije leaning against the stone wall, with a stern look on his face and his strong jaws hard set.

"Whoa!" and once more the two men faced each other.

"Well?" said Lije.

"What I want to ask you is this. You know

what my religion has been to me and my family. We've had our share of sorrer, and reely I don't know what we would have done if it hadn't been for Parson Jessig and his encouragin' talk. Now I 'd like to ask you, honest, Lije, if you don't think our faith was a good thing for us?"

"Sartin I do, and I have never denied it."

"Then don't you wish you had some of it for yourself, Lije? What's good for one is good for t'other."

"No, Rastus, that's where you're mistook. I'm glad you've got religion, if you think it helps you any. But I don't want any for myself."

"You never wish you had it, eh?"

"No, never, Rastus, and that's flat. I don't see the use of it. Believin' what ain't so may be very soothin', but I'd rather believe what is so, and stick it out without bein' soothed. I guess the truth'll stand, and I think I've got it. If you're satisfied, I'm satisfied too. And if

we're both satisfied, there isn't any more to be said."

"Well, Lije, as long as health lasts, and things work all right in the family, you won't feel the need, perhaps, but sometime—"

"Then I reckon I'll wait till the sometime comes before I swaller what I can't understand."

So ended the conference. Lije went home to his well-stocked barn, his rich farm, his healthy boy and girl, and remarked to himself, "I guess I've got about all that any reasonable critter ought to ask for, and as for meracles and providences and new births and them things, well, it's all right if you want 'em, but I don't."

And Rastus went home that night, and as he sat at the window in the cool of the evening, he said to his wife: "Tildy, I don't think Lije is very fur from the kingdom, but sometime he's goin' the rest of the way, and then I hope I'll be here to walk by his side and cheer him on. It's got to come, Tildy, just as sure as taxes."

Then he fell into a reverie.

## II.

### *LIFE ON THE FARM.*

ELIJAH TOMKINS was in some respects a model man in his family. He was a good provider, as the New England phrase runs, a tender-hearted husband, and an exceedingly affectionate father.

His wife, Samantha, was the gentlest creature imaginable; there was nothing aggressive in her nature. She would have lost her sleep, I think, if she had ventured to contradict her liege lord. He dominated, and she obeyed, with many a sigh—for sometimes her burden was heavy to bear—but without an audible murmur. For years after their marriage her relations with religious folk were—well, she had none whatever. The poor creature on one occasion, when

the children were in their teens, timidly expressed a desire to hear preaching, for she had been brought up by a Christian mother, and felt the loss of the Sunday services; but Elijah sharply reproved her. "Ain't you got no more sense, Samanthy?" he said, in a very cold-blooded way, "than to hanker after them fairy tales? If there is any God, can't you find Him for yourself without j'inin' a picnic of pious people, and listenin' to some man who don't know what he's talkin' about? You'll get just as much good settin' under the old elm, and hearin' the wind in the branches, as by goin' to meetin'. I kin get a mighty sight more."

She was rash enough to remonstrate—for she had grown desperate, and longed for that mysterious something which comes into the soul even when an unlettered preacher offers prayer, and an untrained choir sings the praises of the Most High—and replied, half under her breath, "Lije, if you do as you please in that matter, why can't Mary and me do as we please?

'Tisn't much to ask, I'm sure." Then she relapsed into silence, and Lije slammed the door, and went out to the barn to look at a new horse he had bought.

After a little, however, his sense of fair play—for he prided himself on that—overcame his prejudices. "All right, Samanthy," he said, on his return to the house, "you and Mary kin go to meetin' as much as you please. If it don't do any good, p'r'aps it won't do no harm." When explaining the concession to Rastus, which he did in an apologetic way, as though he had exhibited a radical weakness, he remarked, "You see, Rastus, women is different from us. We've got the reasonin' faculties, and they've got the imagination. Now it's necessary for every woman to worship somethin'—it don't make any difference what, but it's got to be somethin'. I rather guess there's a strain of the old pagan blood in 'em. We men have got pretty nigh rid of it, but they haven't, and they don't feel easy in their minds unless they've got

a idol. Now Samanthy can't make a idol out of me, though she come close to it twenty year ago, and so she makes a idol out of religion. It's a kind of home'pathy remedy, I reckon, but she won't get none of it down my throat."

So there was a tacit agreement in the family that Samanthy and the daughter Mary should go to church, but Sam and his father were to remain at home.

This Sam was a magnificent fellow to look upon. Just six feet high, broad-shouldered, big-hearted, and generous to a fault—the sort of boy to go wrong, by the way—he was liked by everybody. You should have seen him on the big pond in the winter, when all the young folks of the village went skating, for then he was at his best. He was lithe as a willow wand, and his muscles were like tempered steel, and in a wrestling-match he had no equal. Physically, he was a superb creature, just such a one as a sculptor would have been glad to get as a model.

"Samanthy and Mary are pretty hefty on theology, but Sam and me don't believe nothin', so the family averages pretty well," Lije was wont to say with a chuckle. "It's them against us, and us against them. Bimeby, if the women folks don't get tired of their nonsense, we'll see how the thing turns out."

Late that afternoon, after the talk with Rastus, Lije went into the kitchen, where the goodwife was preparing supper.

"Samanthy," he began, "I've been discussin' with Rastus, and I'm hungry."

"What'll you have, Lije?"

"Guess I could get away with a bowl of bread and milk, if you have some."

"There's plenty, I guess. Just wait till I put this pie into the oven, and I'll fetch it."

"Got any of that brindle cow's milk, have you? Seems as though that was a little richer than the rest of it."

"Yes, there's a pitcher of it in the cellar."

As he crumbled the bread into the milk, he

said: "Rastus was plowin' up in the northeast field, and he up and at me on the subject of meracles, but I guess I give him as good as he sent."

Lije was in a rather amiable mood, and detailed the conversation at length. When he had reached the end of his story, he turned to his wife with a self-satisfied look, and said, "Samanthy, do you know what I think would be a real meracle?"

"No, I don't, Lije."

"Well, if you was to bake a loaf of bread as heavy as what I ate at Rastus's last week, I should think that was a meracle; but you can't do it."

Then he went to the window. "Hullo!" he said, "the wind has shifted. It's come round to the east'ard. Them clouds look kinder threatenin'. Shouldn't wonder if we might have rain to-morrow. Wall, it always comes my way if I wait long enough."

Then a merry train of thought seemed to run

through his mind, and he broke into a fit of quiet laughter with a touch of sarcasm in it.

"What's the matter with you, Lije?" asked the wife, as she pulled the pie out of the oven to see that the top crust didn't burn. "You are havin' a good time all to yourself."

"Do you remember, Samanthy, that durin' the drouth, mebbe two weeks ago, all you pious people prayed for rain? Say, have you forgot it?"

"Yes, Lije," she answered, in a quiet voice, "we prayed for what we thought we needed."

"And you didn't get it, did you?"

"No, we didn't get it, because, p'r'aps, after all, we didn't need it."

"Didn't need it, eh? Why, the fields was as dry as cork dust, and half the crops was actually burned up. Don't tell me we didn't need it, for we did, and the Lord knowed that just as well as Parson Jessig did."

"We don't know everythin', Lije, though some of us think we do."

"No, I reckon we don't know everythin',

but we have sense enough to know when we want rain, 'specially if we see whole fields of potatoes wiltin' in the sun. You can't get round that. What's the use of bein' a farmer if you can't tell when your crops need water?"

Then again Lije began to laugh to himself.

"What are you doin' now, Lije?"

"Oh, I was merely thinkin'."

"And what was you thinkin'?"

"It occurred to me that you folks down to the church wasted your time prayin' for rain, when every weather-vane in the county was nailed to the west'ard. If you had waited till now, and done you're prayin' this afternoon, you'd 'a' found the wind to the east when you come out of meetin', and you'd all said it was a direct answer to prayer."

Sam came in from the woodshed whistling, his cheeks ruddy with health, as though a stray beam from some sunset had struck them.

"Hullo, folks!" he exclaimed; "going to rain, isn't it?"

"How about them cows?" asked Lije.

"Cows are all right. Old Shorthorn gave me a good chase for once."

"Did she, though?"

"Well, you'd have thought so if you'd been there."

"It'll spile the milk if she run far. How did it happen, Sam?"

"Why, you see Jerry Peters went with me to the field with his dog, and helped to round up the cattle; and that dog took it into his head to have some fun. So he began to worry Shorthorn. He got a grip on her nose, and that riled her. She just lowered her head, and for about five minutes there was a regular circus."

"But what were you doin', boy? Why didn't you drag him off?"

"Wait till I tell you the story, father. I looked into that cow's eyes, and they were like a couple of lighthouses. I concluded that she was able to take care of herself, but I felt kind o'

sorry for the dog. He didn't know what was coming, but he won't worry any more cows."

"Why, did Shorthorn go for him?"

"The dog is under the impression that she did; at least, he was under that impression at the time."

"Was the dog hurt?" asked the mother.

"Considerably, I reckon. At any rate, Peters went home minus the cur, and he did some pretty tall talking, too."

"Did the cow strike him, Sam?"

"That's what I thought," replied Sam. "She took him sidewise, hit him broadside, and the horn went into him like a knife into cheese. She threw him ten feet into the air, and when he came down he didn't even yelp. He just lay where he was, and he's there yet, and will stay there until some one hides him under the bushes."

"Poor dog!" cried Samanthy.

"Ought to have stayed to home," grunted Lije.

"After that," continued Sam, "the cow was nervous—seemed as though she had St. Vitus's dance; and as I didn't care to have her try her other horn on me, I kept at a respectful distance. That cow ought to have been a bull, and born in Spain; she would have made a reputation for herself. That's why I'm late. Where's the milk-pail, mother? I've got lots of chores to do, and I can smell that pie in the oven. Well, Sis, where did you come from?"

Mary had burst into the room, crying, "Mother, when'll supper be ready? I'm as nearly famished as a summer boarder. There! Don't worry about setting the table. Wait half a jiffy till I get my hat and wrap off, and I'll be with you."

It was the work of thirty seconds, and as she reappeared Sam asked, "Where've you been, Sis? Come, confession is good for the soul, provided you've got the article; so make a short story of it."

"Been?"

"Yes, been. Huckleberrying?"

"Not exactly," she replied, as she spread the white table-cloth. "I don't tell all I know, Sam," and she laughed merrily.

"Oh, I see. Having a stroll across the meadow with George Brown, eh?"

"She needn't be ashamed of it if she has," broke in the father, who was apt to take Mary's part when she was being teased.

"All the same, I've been doing nothing of the kind," she replied tartly, as the blood mounted to her cheeks. "A Christian Endeavor branch has been organized in the village, and, and"—she nearly dropped a cup and saucer in her embarrassment—"they chose me chairman."

"Ha, ha! Sis," laughed Sam, "you're right in it up to the chin, ar'n't you? I don't think I'll take any, if it's the same to you. Here, mother, hand me that pail. I want to get out of this religious atmosphere. It is sort of suffocating."

"I don't think a small dose of religion would do you any harm, Sam," Mary retorted; "just a drop or two to warm you up, you know," and she too began to laugh.

"Stuff and nonsense! The best kind of Christian Endeavor is right here in the kitchen, keeping things shipshape. Praying is well enough, I suppose, when you can't find anything better to do; but I reckon there's more religion in milking Brindle without letting her kick the pail over than you can pick up in the wrangling churches of Woodbine. Tra la la, Sis, and you'd better spend an hour or two thinking over what I've said."

Off he went, a cheery, gay-hearted boy, with the making of a man in him.

The father watched him as he swung with long strides toward the barn, and said to himself, "A chip of the old block; Sam knows what he's about, and I guess he can't be fooled."

Then he turned to Mary, who had set the table and was ready for anything.

"Darter, what is this Christian Endeavor scheme, anyhow?"

He wanted to say, "What is all this humbug about?" But that daughter was the apple of his eye, and if she wanted to be a churchwoman he would fight for her rights, though he hated churches with a deadly hatred.

She sat in a chair at his side, and took the old man's hand in a caressing sort of way.

"What do you want to know for, father?" she asked, with a saucy look. "Shall I propose you at the next meeting? Say, mother, wouldn't it surprise folks if father should walk in as a full-fledged member?" and she broke into a merry laugh at the idea.

There was something sharp on his tongue, but she put her hand on his lips and exclaimed, "No, no, father; I know what you want to say, but you sha'n't say it. What mother and I believe is just as good as what you don't believe; so you will please keep still, or you won't have

any supper. I'm a grown-up girl now, and you've got to behave yourself."

"Oh, I haven't nothin' to say," he muttered, while a pleased smile lighted up his rugged face. "You pray, and I plow. You couldn't plow, and I couldn't pray. That's all there is to it. But what kind of a newfangled notion is this? What are you endeavorin' about, anyway?"

"Well, listen, and if you scold me I won't say another word to you as long as I live."

She liked to play the tyrant, and she did it admirably; so when she raised her finger as a menace, he looked at her quizzically, but kept as still as possible.

"You know," she began, "that there are a good many poor people in Woodbine."

"Shiftless, you mean," he interjected.

"Will you keep quiet?" and she put her hand on his arm as a warning.

"These poor people are having a terrible

struggle to get along. Phil & Kuhn posted a notice last month that business was dull, and the mill would only run on half-time."

"Well, why shouldn't they?" growled Lije. "They're not in the philanthropy business, are they?"

"So there are hard times in the village, and when winter comes they'll be harder. A month ago Hiram Golf suggested—"

"What, that cantin' shoemaker?"

"The shoemaker without the cant," she replied sharply. "He suggested at a weekly meeting that we organize a branch of the Christian Endeavor, and do what we could to—"

"What can a parcel of girls do, I'd like to know?"

"Should do what we could to make life comfortable for these folks. There isn't any harm in that, is there? Now answer me, father."

But he had nothing to say.

"We make visits on those who are worst off, and Mr. Jessig preached a sermon and took up

a collection two weeks ago. We got a snug little sum. I didn't have any money with me, but I told them that I had just as good a father as any girl in the world ever had, and I pledged you for—"

"You what?" and Lije was fairly startled, and began to frown.

"Why, I pledged you for five dollars."

"Well, I declare! When you get that money out of me, you let me know, will you? Five dollars for such trumpery stuff! Phew!"

"Look here, father, you don't want me to go back on my word, and I don't intend to. You've got to pay that money, and it won't do to make a wry face over it. Why, if you had been there you would have subscribed ten."

"You don't know me, darter; I wouldn't have done any such thing. Five dollars! Phew! Do you think I'm made of money?" and he shook his head decisively.

"There! You needn't be obstinate. You will honor my promises, or you're not the father

I take you to be. Have you got the money in your wallet? Pull it out and let me see. I must hold up my end, or I wouldn't be your daughter."

The old man squirmed, and moved restlessly in his chair. "Five dollars! You've been terrible extravagant!"

Mary looked him steadily in the face, and he saw that she was determined. He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out an old leather purse. He wasn't accustomed to throw money away after that fashion, and it came hard.

"Oh, what a roll of bills!" she exclaimed. "I wish I had said ten." Then she picked out a fresh five-dollar note and handed the rest back, with, "You are a good father, and I'm proud of you. Ar'n't you, mother? You won't miss it, dear, and it will do lots of good. Now we won't think any more about it."

Then came the call to supper, and Sam sauntered in with his pail of milk.

"What do you think, Sam?" exclaimed Lije.

"Don't do much thinking nowadays; it's dangerous."

"Well, darter's just got five dollars out of me."

"What did she do it with—a corkscrew?"

"And she made me give the money to them Endeavor fellows."

"You?"

"Yes, me, for sartin."

"Then the world's coming to an end."

The old man seemed to enjoy the situation hugely. As they sat at supper, he broke out with, "Jest think of me givin' to a church! I guess I must be in my dotage. Seems like I was goin' back on myself."

## III.

### *THE PARSON COMES TO SUPPER.*

On a certain morning, some three weeks later, Mary and the mother were very busy in the parlor with dust-brush and broom. Apparently they were turning the room upside down, rearranging the furniture, and trying to make things look as cheerful as possible. They both worked with willing hands, because, for some reason, they wanted the room to look its best. Evidently an unusual event was about to happen.

Mary stood in the doorway to get a better view, and critically inspected the *tout ensemble*.

"I don't know but it will do, mother," she said at length, as she threw the dust-brush over her shoulder like a soldier at the order to

"carry arms." "Let me see! Suppose we run the sofa over to that corner, and put it crisscross. Don't you think it would be an improvement?"

"I dunno," replied the old lady, with some hesitation. "It's always been right there, and it might seem strange like to have it anywhere else, don't you think—or what do you think?"

"H'm! let us try it. There's no reason why it should be in one place forever. It will do us all good to make a change, perhaps. Just catch hold of that end, and we'll soon see whether it will do or not."

"Well!" she exclaimed, after it had been done, "I really think the parlor looks better. I wonder we hav'n't thought of that before. Why, you'd hardly know the room, would you? Now I'll run out to the west pasture and get a bunch of goldenrod for the mantel, and then I guess there'll be nothing to complain of. By the way, mother, have you anything special for supper?"

"I've got some cold lamb; won't that do?"

"Do? Why, it's splendid. And then you've got plenty of jam that you made with your own hands, you dear thing, and after dinner we'll make some crullers. We'll have a supper fit for a king."

"But your father, Mary?" asked Samanthy, under her breath.

"Oh, you leave him to me. I'll take care of him."

"He's very set, you know, Mary."

"Yes, and it's all right for a man to be set. I like to have him so. But then I'm set, too, just a bit, deary, and I came by it honestly. When father and I clash, it reminds me of the problem I had in school: When the irresistible comes in contact with the immovable, what happens?" Mary was in a cheery mood. "Don't you worry about father. I'm not half as afraid of him as you are, and he isn't half as terrible as you think he is. He's only a man, and a man doesn't amount to much when he

has as tender a heart as father has. He looks as stern as the Old Man of the Mountain up in New Hampshire, but he isn't very awful, after all."

"Oh dear, what's that?" Samanthy listened intently, and there was just a shade of pallor in her cheeks. "I do believe it's your father, Mary."

"Well, what of it, dear? He isn't Bluebeard, and we are not in the forbidden chamber. Let him come on. 'This rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I!'" And she assumed a threatening attitude, brandished the dust-brush, and again broke into laughter.

The farmer was in the kitchen looking for something. Of course he couldn't find it without help. A man can never find anything without the assistance of a woman, and he is forever under the impression that when something is needed, whether it is a hoe or a rake or a slice of bread and butter, it is the business of the "women folks" to know just where it is.

So Lije, who was on the still hunt for a monkey-wrench, looked everywhere except where he had laid it the day before, and then impatiently called, "Mother, where are you? I say, Samanthy, have you quit the house? I want that monkey-wrench, and I'd like to know what you've done with it."

What *she* had done with it, forsooth! She had never had any use for it, and didn't know how to manage the thing! But the man always says, "What have *you* done with it?"

"Here we are, father," cried Mary, in her most musical voice, and then she began to hum a snatch of an old song, perhaps to keep her courage up. A boy whistles just before an emergency, and a woman hums. It is for the same purpose in both cases. The object is to reduce that swelling in the throat which precedes a transaction about which there is more or less uncertainty.

The old farmer stood in the doorway, and

gazed at the couple with astonishment. Then he looked about the room, and his astonishment increased.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean? Have you been lettin' off a dynamite boom here? Everythin' has been blowed up. What's that sofy doin' over there, I'd like to know?"

"How do you like the change, father?" inquired Mary quietly. "Don't you think it looks better as it is now? Come, you'd best say Yes at once, for you won't get another chance. We live in an age of progress, don't you know, and I'm a progressive woman;" and she marched up and down the parlor like a grenadier on dress-parade.

"Wall, I s'pose I'll git used to it," said Lije, resignedly, and he looked at Mary as though she were worth her weight in gold. "It don't make no difference whether a sofy is here or there, I guess, so long's it's a sofy. But I want that monkey-wrench. The carryall hasn't

been oiled for a month, and I thought I'd do the job before dinner."

"It's in the east cupboard," answered Samanthy, "about where you put it day before yesterday. I don't believe it's run away since that time."

Lije turned to go. "Come back a minute, father; I want you," said Mary. "Tell me, don't you think the parlor is as pretty a room as you ever saw?"

"It'll do, it'll do, but I want that monkey-wrench."

"It's a nice room to have company in, isn't it?" boldly broke forth Samanthy.

"Company?" and Lije was almost startled. "What's up, eh?"

"Oh, nothin' partic'lar; only Mr. Jessig said after service Sunday mornin' that he was comin' in this direction to-day if it was pleasant, and might just call in for a few minutes."

The women folks both felt happier when the secret was out. Mary looked steadily at her

father, for she knew his moods, and had long ago discovered that the easiest way to make him bend was to state a fact bluntly. If he saw that you were not afraid he was apt to succumb to anything reasonable, but if you were timid it seemed to rouse all the tyranny in the man's nature.

"Parson Jessig comin' here! Well, that beats all. What on earth do we want a parson in this house for? Ain't you folks runnin' things pretty strong? Seems to me it's ridiculous. We've lived here for twenty-six year, and none of these cantin' clergy has ever darkened my doors, and I tell you plainly that—"

"Yes, father, and you are quite right. I agree that a canting clergyman is about as small a specimen as you can find anywhere."

"Yes, I always feel like settin' Tige on 'em when I see 'em," continued Lije.

"But Mr. Jessig isn't one of that kind, father. He's just a whole-souled man, if ever there was one, and I'm sure you'd like him."

"Like him!" sneered Lije. "I hate him; I hate the whole swarm."

Then Mary, who saw that the crisis had arrived, used a fine bit of finesse. She broke into a fit of laughter, danced about the room flourishing the dust-broom, and then cried, "I've got it, I've got it!"

"Are you crazy, darter?"

"Not exactly, father, but I'm about to try an experiment, and on you, you precious old skeptic. I guess I'll see whether you are going to abuse all my friends. You mustn't do it, for I won't stand it," and she quietly put both hands on the old man's shoulders. It was always half the victory when she could do that, and it was always a serious emergency when she had to do it.

"I'm going—" and she hesitated, but there was a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"Goin' to what?" asked Lije, who knew that he was already hopelessly defeated, but tried to make a show of opposition.

"Why, I'm going to ask Mr. Jessig to stay to supper, and you shall have a good talk with him."

Lije was dumfounded: for a full minute he couldn't catch his breath.

"Look here, darter, you're goin' too far, and I won't endure it."

"No, it's all fixed, and I expect you to be a gracious host to a gracious guest, do you hear? Now get all your chores done early, and come in and put on your very best, I was going to say go-to-meeting, clothes, and we'll have a real jolly evening."

"Well, well, I guess it's about time for the world to come to an end. What will Rastus Brown say when he hears of these doin's? 'Pears to me I'm gettin' into rather deep water: first you make me give five dollars to these Endeavorers, and now the parson is comin' to supper."

"Won't it be just splendid, though?" and Mary clapped her hands in glee.

Lije looked at her in a dazed sort of way, and then, suddenly pulling himself together, turned to go, saying, "Just find that monkey-wrench, will you? I want to get out of doors, for I'm pretty near chokin'. I don't think I'm Lije Tomkins any more."

Mary, little saint as she was, saw the struggle which the father had had with himself, and almost pitied him, for it was only his love for her that made him yield. With the impetuosity of a chivalric nature, she ran to him, put her arms about his neck, and kissed him on either cheek.

"You are not sorry, father, are you? I don't want to do anything that would offend you."

"No, darter," he answered, "no; have your own way. P'r'aps it's best, after all."

For some reason he seemed to be overcome by Mary's tenderness; but he instantly recovered, and exclaimed, almost sternly, "Give me that monkey-wrench, will you? I can't stay

here all day doin' nothin';" and in another moment he was gone.

At about four o'clock that afternoon Lije was sitting in his accustomed seat in the kitchen and feeling rather uncomfortable. He had on his best suit, and was consequently like a fish out of water. He was exasperated at the visit of Jessig, and had given his consent as a matter of sheer necessity. "Fellers who trade on superstition," he used to say, "I don't want nothin' to do with 'em." He found a modicum of consolation, however, in the clay pipe which he pulled at with unusual vigor, sending angry clouds of smoke to the ceiling. Samanthy and Mary were upstairs "tidyin' themselves up" and getting ready to receive their visitor with all possible formality.

As Lije glanced through the window he saw two men in a Concord wagon turn in at the gate. He didn't recognize either of them, for they were partly hidden by the trees. He went to the front door, however, to see what was

wanted, when he exclaimed, in great surprise, "Why, Sam, is that you, boy? What's up, eh? Where did you leave the team?"

"Yes, I'm right here, father," said Sam cheerily, "and you can thank this stranger for bringing me here."

"Well, well, I must say I don't understand. Has anythin' broke?"

"Yes; I had on a heavy load, you know, and that off horse, Billy"—here he sprang from the wagon to the porch steps—"was terribly nervous. I think you'll have to sell him, father; he can't be depended on. We got across the bridge all right, but that confounded mud-hole at the foot of the hill is what brought us up all standing. I told Tim to be careful and steer clear of it, but the first thing I knew the wheel went slump into it. Tim and I tugged away with all our might, but Billy was in the dumps and wouldn't draw."

"I'll sell him, for sartin," interjected Lije.

"I don't think we'd have got home to-night if it hadn't been for this gentleman. He tied his horse to a fence, and then he and I put our shoulders to that wheel, while Tim coaxed the horses; but the thing wouldn't budge."

All this time the stranger was looking on at the scene in an amused sort of way, and when Sam referred to him in such pleasant terms he made a gesture of deprecation. "It was nothing, I assure you. I was only too glad to be of service."

"Where's your team now, Sam?"

"Oh, it's all right; and it'll be here in half an hour. You see, father, this gentleman noticed that Tim only riled Billy and made him more balky than ever. So he said to Tim, 'You come here and try at the wheel, and I'll handle the horse. I was brought up with such critters as that.' So he just took Billy by the bit, and in about two minutes had got him into a reasonable frame of mind. 'Now then,' he said,

'when I give the word you two do your best, and Billy and I will help.' I don't know what he said to the horse, but he talked to him as though he had been a horse himself sometime"—at which the stranger chuckled heartily—"and then of a sudden cried, 'Come, Billy,' and yelled to us to give the wheel a hoist. I thought the harness would snap, for those horses pulled as they never pulled before, and out of the hole came the wagon."

"Thank you, stranger," said Lije heartily. "'Tisn't every man would have done it, an' I'm obleeged. I'd ask you to come in, but the women folks expects company."

"Well, I'll tell the rest if you please, father. I knew I'd be late for supper unless I hurried up, and said so, when the stranger remarked that he was coming my way, and would put me down at the house. I told him the parson was going to inflict himself on us for the evening, and I had a curiosity to see what kind of a monstrosity he was. I wanted to get home be-

fore he arrived, so's to rig up and receive him with all the honors."

Then father and son had a very merry two minutes. Lije enjoyed Sam's criticism amazingly, but the stranger seemed somewhat embarrassed at the turn of affairs, and had just got as far as "Excuse me, neighbors, but perhaps I ought to explain—" when Samanthy and Mary appeared on the porch.

Samanthy actually ran down the steps in her eagerness of welcome, exclaiming, "Well, how do you do, Mr. Jessig? I'm right glad to see you. Come into the house, and Sam will put the horse in the barn."

The secret was out. Then this stranger was Jessig himself, the parson! For about thirty seconds Lije looked at Sam and Sam looked at Lije, but neither of them uttered a word. Then Jessig broke into a fit of uncontrolled laughter, in which everybody joined.

"This is a very pleasant introduction to your family circle, Mr. Tomkins," he said, "and I

have no doubt we shall get on very well together."

The four went indoors, while Sam, making a few remarks to himself in an undertone, led the parson's horse to the barn.

## IV.

### *A HOT DISCUSSION.*

THE incident just related seemed to place Jessig and the farmer's family *en rapport* with each other. It was referred to again and again during supper, and both Sam and his father forgot their antagonism to all parsons, and treated Jessig as they would have treated any other neighbor who had chanced to call at the evening-meal hour.

The minister remarked, as he took his seat at table, that he had had a hard day's work and could get only a bite for dinner, so he must be excused if he indulged in their good things pretty largely. "A man with a perfect digestion," he said, with a smile, "has something to be proud of, and if you will allow me I propose to do ample justice to this delicious supper."

That was a subtle compliment to Samanthy's housekeeping, and she floated away into the seventh heaven at once. Jessig entered heartily into the family life, asked concerning the crops, and discoursed in a happy vein about the care of cattle. He talked politics, related some humorous experiences he had recently had with the hands at the mill, and fairly won Lije's heart.

I can't help regarding Jessig as a remarkable and therefore a very exceptional fellow. He was always the minister, but he never forgot that he was also a man. He was willing to do Christ's work in Christ's way, and was consequently satisfied with his little sphere in the village of Woodbine. Most ministers want to do Christ's work in their own way, and hunger for a settlement over some rich and fashionable parish. Jessig expected to go to heaven after a while, but he was anxious to have as many go with him as possible. He very seldom talked about religion in set terms, but any one could

see by his bearing that religious manliness was his strong peculiarity.

Moreover, he was tolerant of adverse opinions. How could it be otherwise when he had associated almost daily with Hiram Golf, the shoemaker, for over two years? He had looked forward to this visit to the farm, for Lije, as the village folks said, was a hard nut to crack. Besides, Jessig had more than once remarked to himself that he was so accustomed to take religious truths for granted that it would be an intellectual refreshment to come into contact with a thoughtful man who doubted pretty nearly everything and could give some reason for doing so.

Hiram once said to him, "Parson, don't talk religion too much. Just simply BE religious, and you'll give 'em an argyment they can't get over." Jessig had never forgotten that, and he adopted the sentiment as a policy. As a consequence, he was respected by that large class which may be found in every manufacturing

district, who do not take the trouble to have religious opinions, and who look at churches as the fad of many women and some men.

When Lije was out in the barn that afternoon looking at the feed in the corn and oat bins he couldn't tell whether he was glad or mad at the parson for coming. "I never was acquainted with one of them pious folks who knowed much," he said, in soliloquy; and as he had always avoided personal interviews with clergymen I shall not take any pains to contradict his statement. "Let me see"—he lifted the lids of the bins—"I guess there's cracked corn enough for the horses to chew on for a fortnight longer;" and then, with a chuckle, "I reckon if I get that minister alone for half an hour I'll give him one or two problems to chew on, too. I'll mighty soon find out what sort of stuff he's made of."

When the supper was over the women busied themselves for a while with the dishes, Sam went to see that the cows were all right for the

night, and the farmer and Jessig sat on the porch. Lije filled his pipe. It was a superb evening, and the last rays of sunset empurpled the clouds in the west. A hazy atmosphere covered the landscape, and nothing could be heard except the last chirp of the birds for the day and the drowsy hum of insects.

Lije was in a controversial mood. He was like a war-horse chafing at the bit and pawing the ground before a battle. Jessig intuitively took in the situation, and calmly awaited developments. He didn't propose to strike the first blow, and so began to talk about the beauties of nature. Lije grew restless, but soon eased his mind by saying bluntly:

"Parson, I don't believe in your religion, an' I don't care who knows it."

That was the blast of the trumpeter calling the sir knights to the tournament.

"Well," replied Jessig quietly, "what of it? You have a perfect right not to believe, and I should be the last person to interfere with you.

Everybody is bound to follow his own judgment, wherever it may lead."

"No, I don't believe in religion," continued Lije defiantly, "an' I don't think much of the brains of them that do."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, that's it exactly."

"Well, you are hardly fair, are you, farmer? Aren't you a bit uncharitable?"

"Why am I?"

"Because you have no patience with a man who doesn't think just as you do. That is what you imply, isn't it?"

"Not as I know of I don't," and the response was a bit sullen. "I'd like to know how you make that out."

"You say you have some very decided opinions on the subject of religion?"

"Precisely."

"And you add that if any one has equally decided opinions on the other side of the question he can't have a well-regulated mind. Ex-

cuse me, neighbor, but I don't think it's quite nice of you to say that. For example, take my own case. I believe a great many things that you do not, but does it follow that I haven't any reasons for my belief and that my brain is out of order?"

"I can't see how any one can believe what you are supposed to believe, an' I've always said there was a lot of hypocrisy in it." Lije was desperate.

"Well, farmer, there are some things which no man has a right to do, and one of them is to insist that he is the only one in the world who has got the truth. It strikes me that you have too high an opinion of yourself when you say that unless every one sees just what you see there must be something the matter with his eyes. Now my theory is very different from that."

"Wall, how does it look to you, parson?"

"Why, I believe certain things, and you don't. I know why I believe them, and you

know why you don't believe them. You've got brains and so have I. You want the truth and nothing but the truth, and so do I. Now are you going to call me a fool, or am I going to call you a fool? If we do, then we are really fools. But if we are honest men we shall honestly differ, and still maintain our respect and love for each other. Now it strikes me that I am a little fairer than you are."

Lije puffed at his pipe. He intended to give the parson something to chew on, but the parson had given it to him instead. However, he wasn't through by any means. He shrewdly turned the conversation, saying, "Now there's my boy Sam. Isn't he about right, parson?"

"Yes, physically, he's a fine fellow. When I saw him put his shoulder to the wheel of that mired wagon, and the blood rush into his face as he strained every muscle, I thought I had never seen a finer example of manliness."

"He's got brains too," Lije hastened to add.

"No doubt, no doubt. I spoke of his body

because I have seen what he can do with it. I haven't had an opportunity to see his mind yet, but if mind and body are equal you may well be proud of him."

"He flies off once in a while, as I wish he didn't," and a shade passed over the farmer's face; "but that's only the wild oats which everybody sows. I s'pose I sowed a lot in my time, but I don't happen to remember it. He's got in with some fellows down in the village, but he'll stiffen up in time and come out the best foot forrard. Parson, you're right; I am proud of him."

Jessig nodded approvingly.

"Now that boy was brought up on my idees."

"Ah!"

"He had good schoolin', an' is fond of his books. But I said when he was born that he shouldn't be hampered by any religious notions. He should grow up just as natur' intended, an' he has."

"Yes? And you are satisfied with the result?"

"So far, I am. He hasn't an ounce of theology in his whole system, no pizen in his blood of that kind. What he wants to do he does, an' what he don't want to do he don't do. He's about as square as boys ever are, I guess, an' he'll learn after a while how to blaze his way to a farm of his own."

Jessig was silent for a few moments; he was pondering a very difficult problem, and hardly knew how to manage it. At length, however, he said, with apparent irrelevancy, "Farmer, that's a fine field you have just over the hillside yonder."

Lije was partly offended, because he thought Jessig didn't regard his statements as worth answering; but this yielded to the conviction that he had given the parson a poser, and he couldn't answer it.

"Yes," he said, but rather glumly, as he looked in the direction of the field, "that's the four best acres on the farm."

"Were they originally the best, farmer, or have you made them so?"

"O parson, land isn't made rich except in one way. Some plots are better'n others, but in this section of the world it's all poor enough. If you want to get a crop you've got to put in the work. That field has cost me a pile of trouble. It was pretty stony to start with, but see how even the sod is now; there isn't a stone to be seen."

"But it has paid for the labor expended, has it?"

"Yes, sartin. Still, there's one botheration. The weeds grow like all possessed. I wish land could be made that would raise wheat and potatoes but would kill weeds. No use, though. If you want to get a first-class crop out of that land, you've got to stay up nights pullin' weeds."

"It's a curious law, neighbor, isn't it, that if you don't watch the weeds you can't have your potatoes or corn?"

"Yes, cur'ous enough; but it's the law, all the same, an' the sooner you re-cog-nize it, an' govern yourself accordin'ly, the better off you are. I don't believe in goin' contrary to law."

"Now tell me something, farmer, will you?"

"Sartin, if I can."

"Why do you interfere with the weeds? Why not sow your seed, and then just leave the field to take care of itself? Haven't the weeds as good a right to grow as the potatoes? And if you leave matters to take care of themselves, will they or won't they do it?"

Lije looked at Jessig, but didn't see the faint smile that was playing about his lips. He was almost impatient as he said:

"Parson, you may be a very good preacher, but you'd make a mighty poor farmer. If you had this land I guess you'd be bankrupt in about two year."

"Ah, yes, perhaps; but you see I was just thinking, neighbor Tomkins."

"Thinkin', was you? Well, your thinkin' don't amount to much if that's the best you can do."

"I was very much interested in what you were saying. You assert that if you don't train your field, so to speak, by plowing and manuring, and if, after doing that, you don't keep an eye on the weeds, you won't have any crop."

"Of course I do. Ask any farmer in the county an' he'll tell you the same thing. A man might as well sell out before he begins, unless he plows an' manures an' keeps at the weed-pullin'."

"Wouldn't land grow a crop if you let it have its own way, allowed it to do what its own nature inclined it to do?"

Lije burst into a loud laugh. "Wall," he said sneeringly, as though he would reprove the parson for his folly, "don't you never buy a farm, if you intend to act on them principles. Better stick to the pulpit, for you wouldn't earn your salt."

"Oh, don't mistake me, neighbor; I entirely agree with you in all you have said."

"You do, eh? What for, then, have you been puttin' such foolish questions? Seems rather queer, doesn't it?"

"No, I think not," and Jessig had a very thoughtful air. His voice was low and calm, as it always was when he was in deadly earnest. "No, farmer, I think not; but I was wondering why you believe in educating your field and don't believe in educating your son."

Lije saw the point of the discussion at last, and looked at Jessig in a dumfounded sort of way.

"There's a big difference," he muttered, "between a potato-field and a boy."

"Oh yes, a very big difference, since it is a thousand times more important for the boy to go right than for the field to do so. I can't quite see why weeds won't grow in the boy's life just as they do in the field unless you keep a good lookout for them. When I was a

youngster it took all the influences that could be brought to bear to keep me straight. If I had been brought up on the policy which you seem to think best I don't know what would have become of me."

The farmer was cornered, and he knew it. He was just saying, "Don't worry about Sam; he'll square up by and by," when Samanthy and Mary came upon the porch.

"We ain't disturbin' you, are we?" asked Samanthy timidly.

"No; I was thinkin' it was about time for you to come," remarked Lije courteously, and I rather think he felt greatly relieved. A few minutes later Sam appeared, and the little circle was complete.

The conversation ran on very pleasantly for an hour after that, and everybody seemed to be happy. All sorts of subjects, from the latest fashions in bonnets to the comet which had just been discovered, were touched upon, and Jessig was on the point of saying that he must be

going home, when Lije, who wasn't exactly satisfied with the result of his controversies, returned desperately to the fray.

"I had a set-to with Rastus Brown the other day on meracles, parson. I guess he thinks there are such things, but I hear from the papers that the best students nowadays have kind of given 'em up."

Jessig was not at all eager for a dispute, for he wanted the visit to end as pleasantly as it had begun, but at the same time he didn't intend to shirk one. He failed to make answer for a moment, long enough for Sam and his father to exchange glances, and Mary and Samanthy to move uneasily in their chairs.

"What do you say, parson?" and the farmer seemed like a toreador trying to madden the bull in the arena by pricking him with the point of his spear.

"Oh, it's a large subject," said Jessig at length, "and the stars are out, and I must go home."

Lije thought he had found a weak spot in Jessig's armor, and if that were so he didn't propose to let him off. "I've thought a good deal on the matter," he said, "an' I can't find no reason for 'em at all. Can you?"

The minister saw that he was in for it, and that he must either fight or run. So he settled himself quietly in his chair, saying:

"Neighbor, what do you mean by a miracle?"

"Somethin' that's teetotally ag'in' natur', that's what I mean."

"Then we needn't have any discussion, for I entirely agree with you," he responded.

"You do? Wall, I'm glad of it. You don't believe in them meracles in the New Testament then, I reckon?"

"Oh yes, I do," was the quick answer.

"Ain't they ag'in' natur'?" asked Lije.

"I think there is a little confusion between us," said Jessig. "Suppose we clear it up so as to see what we are driving at. What do you

mean when you say that a miracle is against nature?"

"I mean that a meracle goes ag'in' all the laws of natur'. Isn't that plain enough, parson?"

"Not quite," said Jessig. "Do you mean that a miracle contradicts all laws of nature, or merely those with which we are familiar? If we were thoroughly acquainted with the whole range of nature, and then something should be said to occur which was contrary to our knowledge, I think we should be justified in doubting it; but if an occurrence is based on as good testimony as any other fact of history, I think we should hesitate to reject it simply because nothing of the kind has ever happened in our own experience. Our experience is somewhat limited, and it is dangerous to say that this, that, or the other thing can't possibly have occurred."

"But raisin' a dead man to life is ag'in' what you know anythin' about, isn't it, parson?"

"Certainly it is. But if a dozen or a hundred persons were present and saw it done, and we have their testimony to that fact, we must do one of two things: either deny the fact for no other reason than that we were not there ourselves to see it, or else admit it on the evidence, and account for it by a range of laws which we as yet know nothing about. Or possibly we might not try to account for it at all."

"That would be pretty slim reasonin'," retorted Lije. "The best way is to brush all them things aside an' stick to your common sense. I guess I've got you there, parson," and Lije was triumphant.

"Now I'll tell you somethin'," he continued. "The other evenin', while we was in the kitchen, darter here read a story about them Indian jugglers. It seems that one of 'em stood out in front of the crowd with a long rope in his hand. All to once he twirled the rope round an' flung it straight up in the air. One end didn't come down, an' after a minute or two

the juggler climbed up that rope hand over hand, an' then pulled the rope up after him. He threw it up ag'in, an' that time climbed up clear out of sight."

"Rather odd, wasn't it?" remarked Jessig.

"Odd! Why, parson, that was a meracle," and he laughed; "just such a meracle as you say you believe in."

"But you don't believe it, farmer?"

"Wall, no, I guess not; but it's just as reasonable as the stuff the people is told is real history."

I think Lije was profoundly happy while telling this story, for he was sure that the parson could find no way to crawl out.

"Your illustration," said Jessig, after a little, "is admirable. I doubt if a better one could be found. Now suppose that this juggler were here to-night, and should disappear in the air in the same way, and you should see it with your own eyes, what would you say?"

"I guess he would be so astonished that

he wouldn't say anything," interjected Sam. "He'd think he had brain-fever, and put for his bed."

"It would be a meracle, parson, wouldn't it?"

"To whom would it be a miracle?" asked Jessig.

"Wall, I reckon to everybody who saw it," sneered Lije.

"No, not exactly," remarked Jessig.

The little company all turned toward Jessig, for his statement was somewhat remarkable.

"No," he repeated, "not exactly. It would be a miracle to us who were looking on, and didn't understand how it was done; but to the man who did it and understood how he did it it would not be a miracle at all."

"Everythin'," persisted Lije, "goes by law, an' what's ag'in' law is ag'in' common sense."

"Precisely, and nothing has ever happened that contravened a law. Now that juggler happens to be acquainted with a law that we know nothing about, and in accordance with that law

he throws the rope, and the end stays in the air, and he can climb up to it. Admitting the fact that the juggler performs this feat, as we all should do if we were to see him do it, I still insist that it is no miracle according to your definition, for it isn't contrary to law, but in accordance with a law which we don't know."

"Then I reckon you'd say that the curin' of a deaf man was not ag'in' law, would you?"

"Most assuredly," was the answer. "Jesus Christ, as the Son of the God who made all law, was not likely to do anything that would show that His Father's laws didn't cover every possible emergency. I can't conceive of Christ as doing anything that was not strictly in accordance with law."

"Healin' the palsied by a touch," snapped Lije.

"Yes, even that," was the quiet response. "And, farmer, I believe the time is coming, and is not far distant, when a whole new realm of psychological law will be discovered, just as

Columbus discovered America, and when the miracles of Christ will be repeated on the earth. That is going far, I admit, and many will not agree with me, but I believe it. I call these incidents of New Testament history miracles simply because I have no better word to express my idea of what happened. But a miracle is merely something which some one does who knows more about law than I do. Suppose one of our grandfathers should come down here for a while, and see you stand at one end of a wire, and be told that you were talking to a man in Chicago, and should hear his voice in answer to your question. He would call that a miracle, and to him it would be one. But to us who have studied the problems of electricity, and know what it can do, it would be no miracle at all, only a commonplace, every-day affair. When we know more, my friends, we shall be able to do more. The age of miracles is never over, for everybody lives in it. What were miracles yesterday are not miracles to-day,

and what are miracles to-day will not be so the day after to-morrow."

There was silence for a time in that little household. The mother and daughter were serenely happy, but I think that Sam and his father were not equally pleased.

"I have had a charming time," said Jessig, as he rose to go. "I don't know when I have had so delightful an evening. And, farmer, you will pardon me if I have seemed to be over-earnest. I hope I have given you no offense. What we are all after is the truth, and I want to say that I have been instructed by our long chat. Come and see us, all of you. The latch-string is always out."

Ten minutes later Jessig drove out into the summer night with very agreeable memories of this little family circle.

## V.

### *THE FARMER IS ANGRY.*

How sensitive love is to the loved one's moods! A young Hungarian, who is a fine musician, used to visit me during the long winter evenings, and he always brought his violin with him. He couldn't have left the instrument at home any more than he could have left his heart there. When he went for a stroll in the country, even, he carried the violin with him, because it was part of himself. It was his intimate companion and friend, and he was on the most confidential terms with it. Instead of talking to himself, as many people do, he played. Indeed, he could express himself by music better than in any other way. Words were poor vehicles for his thought, but when he had the bow in his hand and the violin under his chin,

he could converse in a way that I entirely understood. His frame of mind showed itself by musical tones, and the moment he touched the strings I caught his mood.

Sometimes he was hilarious, and then the notes would trip through the air like so many fairies having a wild dance. There was laughter in every vibration, and I could see that his soul was bubbling over with merriment. At other times he was in a fit of the blues, and not even the bright skies and the flowers and the twittering of the birds could make him feel that life was worth anything. Then how different the strains he called forth! The notes seemed to be full of anguish and doubt and timidity and fear. They trembled, just as he was trembling in his mind and heart, and if he had talked for an hour he could not have made his mood more plain to me.

There are a thousand ways in which we express ourselves, and I often think that words are the poorest of them all. Especially is this true

of people who have lived long together, and whose love has remained pure and fresh. They find a significance in a footfall, in a posture, in a glance, or in a gesture. A woman may communicate a great many things by the way she walks across the room, for a joyous walk is very different from a sad walk, and the step of a person who is pondering is not the step of a person who has nothing disturbing on her mind.

Love can tell by the inflection of the voice that the lover is not at ease with himself, and the wife does not know what love means who needs to have her husband say that things are going right or wrong. She knows by his tread on the gravel walk long before he reaches the house, and by the quality of his voice, even when he makes an effort to conceal his thoughts. Nothing can be hidden from an intuitive nature, especially if one has lived with a person many years and knows exactly how he is accustomed to do things.

So Lije knew that Samanthy was unhappy. As he sat in the kitchen that chill November morning he watched the good woman. He couldn't have told you why he thought she was troubled, but it was perfectly evident that she was. There was a difference in the way in which she lifted the lid of the stove to put a fresh bit of wood on the fire, and in which she opened the oven door to see if the bread was baking all right.

He puffed away, but for a while said nothing. For that matter, he didn't wish to say anything, because when a man and wife have mutually discovered something disagreeable they are apt to conceal it from each other as long as possible. Lije suspected that Samanthy knew just what he knew, but he hesitated to talk about it, and felt even timid, for he dreaded the effect. At last, however, unconsciously Samanthy heaved a sigh, and going to the window, stood there buried in her thoughts.

Lije watched her for a minute or two, and

then determined to make a clean breast of the whole thing.

"Samanthy!" he said.

"Yes, Lije, what is it?" but she didn't turn her face toward him. She still looked out of the window, but saw nothing except what was in her own heart.

"What's the matter, mother?" He always called her "mother" in their tenderest moments.

"Oh, nothin', Lije; just nothin' at all."

"Yes, mother, somethin's botherin' you."

"I didn't sleep well last night, Lije, an' I never could stand a broken night. I don't see how it is, but when I can't sleep I get restless the next day. That's all ails me, I reckon."

"No, Samanthy, you don't use me fair," persisted Lije. "There's somethin' partic'lar weighin' on your mind, an' I know it."

"O Lije, you're always gettin' up a scare about me, an'"—rather petulantly—"I wish you wouldn't. There! just go out an' split some wood, an' I'll 'tend to my oven, or that

bread'll be burned to a crisp," and she made a sudden dash for the stove.

"I say, mother, you can get along without wood for the next half-hour, an' I don't care a button if that loaf of bread is burned to a cinder. I've got somethin' to say to you an' you've got somethin' to say to me, an' we may as well say it an' have it over."

Samanthy drew herself up and stood face to face with her husband, a wild, imploring look in her eyes.

"Mother, tell me!" and Lije laid his pipe on the table. The crisis had come, and could no longer be postponed.

"What shall I tell you, Lije?"

"Is it about—" then a short pause, and with a slight tremble in his voice he repeated himself, "is it about Sam?"

The dear woman couldn't say Yes. She merely bowed her head and looked the picture of despair for an instant; then, burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears.

"So I thought! So I thought!" and Lije suddenly became rigid and stern.

"I don't know what we can do, Lije. Mary an' I have prayed for him over an' over again, but it don't seem to do any good. He's goin' wrong, an' it appears like as though nothin' would stop him."

"There isn't a doubt that he's goin' wrong," said Lije bitterly, "an' I reckon you must do somethin' better than prayin' for him. That's all folderol."

"He's got in with those city boys," moaned Samanthy, "an' last night when he come home he was—" no, she couldn't utter that word, but she sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Was you awake, mother, when Sam came home?"

"Yes, Lije, an' it was pretty near midnight."

"I heard him," said Lije quietly and sadly.

"Were you awake too, father?"

"Yes, it happened so;" and Lije shook his head.

It happened so! How unwilling a man is to show any deep emotion! The truth is, Lije hadn't slept half an hour all night. He was made of steel in every other part, but he had a heart of flesh. There had been rumors for a month that Sam had got into bad company. The farmer discredited them for a while, but it very soon became evident that there was some truth in them. Sam had neglected his work, and found an excuse nearly every evening to go to the village. His whole bearing had changed.

It is curious that the world is so made that coasting downhill is frightfully easy, and dragging the sled uphill is frightfully hard; but we must face facts. Sam was coasting downhill at a terrible rate, but the father at first thought it was only a youthful spasm and would soon wear off. At last, however, affairs assumed a very serious aspect. Sam began to throw out hints that farm drudgery didn't suit his tastes, and talked pretty freely of going to the city and

starting some business wherein he could make more money. The old man grew anxious, but until now had kept his anxiety to himself.

"Wall," he said, in a defiant way, "we've got to meet things when they come, an' now this has come."

Just then Mary entered. At a glance she saw that Sam was the subject of discussion, but went over to the cupboard and pretended to be very busy with the dishes.

"I can tell you one thing," said Lije, and the lines about his mouth grew hard.

"What's that, Lije?"

"I don't propose to have my home broken up by anythin' of this kind, that's what."

"But what can we do, father?" And I think if you had seen the mother's face at that moment it would have broken your heart.

"Do? I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do. Neither Sam nor any one else shall spile your life, Samanthy. You come first, I guess, an' Sam comes next. If he wants to go to the city,

then to the city he shall go. An' if he wants to go to the devil it isn't none of my business."

"Father!" And Mary, as white as a snowbank, stood face to face with the old man. "You don't mean anything of the kind, and you know it."

"I'll soon show you what I mean," he answered, and his voice was like the ring of chilled steel. "I've brought that boy up the best I know how. When you an' me are gone, Samanthy, the farm will go to him an' Mary, an' there'll be land enough for both of 'em. He can step right into my shoes an' run the concern as I have run it. If he don't want to do that, an' has got a lot of newfangled notions about the city, he won't be no good here. Farmin' amounts to nothin' when a man don't like to farm it. I'll give him enough to start him in business, if that's what he's after, an' then he must shift for himself. But as for havin' him round here, spilin' the peace of my family,

I won't do it. He's got to go, whether he likes it or not."

"You wouldn't throw poor Sam out in the world as he is now, father?" And Samanthy went over to where the old man was sitting. She trembled in every limb, and there was horror in every line of her face. "You couldn't do it; no, no, you couldn't do it."

"You'll see whether I can or not," he replied. "This household is goin' to be kept just as it is; an' if Sam isn't satisfied, he must pack up his belongin's an' go somewhere else."

"But what would become of him in the city, father?" cried Mary. "He doesn't know anything about city ways, and with his present habits he would surely be lost."

"That's his affair," and Lije looked for the moment like a tyrant.

"Look here, father." Mary took a seat in front of Lije, and rested her arm on the table. She dared to say anything to the old man, for she had inherited his courage, and now she de-

termined to meet the emergency, to brave the tempest, and to stand up for the poor boy. He should not leave that house, where there were protecting influences, and be thrown upon the tender mercies of strangers in a city full of temptation, if she could help it.

"Look here, father," she repeated. "Sam is not only your son, but my brother. It would just kill mother to have him sent away, and it shall not be done. You are not in your right mind. A person can be drunk on anger as well as on liquor, and you are so angry that you don't know what you are saying."

The mother put her face in her apron, and cried, "Lije, father, don't say such things. He'll get over it after a while. If you use him rough that will be the end of him, for he's just like you, an' won't stand it. Leave him to Mary an' me. We can bring him round, an' he'll be just as good as ever."

"Let me tell you, father," broke in Mary,

"just how this thing began, and then you will understand it better."

"I don't want to know how it begun; it's enough to know how it is now, an' I won't stand it. Do you s'pose I'm goin' to see that woman cryin' herself to death because this boy must have whisky? Isn't she as much to me as he is, I'd like to know? An' isn't it my duty to look after her first of all?"

"But you won't look after her, father, by driving Sam away," and Mary was by this time calm and cold as an icicle. She had herself well in hand, and every word was made to tell like the impact of a bullet. "On the contrary, you will kill both mother and me if you pursue this course. It is bad enough to have Sam give way to bad habits at home, where we can look after him, but how much worse it would be to have him in the city, where he might get sick, with no place to go to but the hospital! Sam is a good boy, and he has noble qualities.

It is on account of those very qualities that he has fallen."

"That is simply ridic'lous," sneered Lije. "How can a man drink because he's a good fellow, an' disgrace himself an' his family because he's a good fellow? I guess you borrowed that nonsense from Parson Jessig."

"Sometime in September," continued Mary, "two young men with plenty of money came to the village, and put up at the hotel. They were here, they said, for the shooting season, and you know the woods back of us are famous for partridges. Well, they were out with their team one day over there by the sawmill. I don't know how it happened, but the horses took fright and ran. They were dashing along the road at breakneck speed, and right ahead, where there wasn't room for two teams to pass, was John Perkins with a load of lumber. There would certainly have been a terrible accident if Sam hadn't been there. He is as strong as a lion, you know, and he can run like a deer.

He saw how matters stood, and saw John Perkins's team—this he told me himself—and knew that it would be sure death to some one unless those horses were headed off. Without thinking of any danger to himself, he made a dash, stumbled, but managed to catch himself, and got hold of the team when it was not more than ten rods from the lumber-wagon. That was what occurred, and at that moment, father, we all had reason to be proud of Sam, for there isn't another fellow in the village who could have done what he did.

"Well, of course the men who were saved were grateful; and well they might have been. But their gratitude was the beginning of everything that has befallen. If Sam had been a coward, or even if he had lamed himself when he stumbled, he might be working on the farm now, with no thought of anything else. But simply because he was strong and brave the temptation came in his way.

"Then these men insisted that he should go

to the hotel with them, and he did so. They overwhelmed him with praise, and then ordered a bottle of champagne to celebrate his daring and their rescue. Sam had no scruples about drinking, and as the taste of the wine was pleasant he drank too much.

"After that they invited him to go partridge-shooting with them, and of course he neglected his work here. He was fascinated by the strangers. They wore such good clothes, owned such fine guns, seemed to have more money than they knew what to do with, and talked far above the poor boy on all subjects. No wonder his head was turned, and no wonder that milking cows and doing chores grew irksome to him. If it had all ended there nothing serious might have happened. But it didn't. They were fond of him, and wanted to make him like themselves. So they very soon got away from the light wines and took to whisky. Champagne was simply their show drink, but whisky was what they liked; so Sam learned to

drink whisky. Then came games of chance, and soon it was convenient to take a private room over the saloon at the corner, and there the revels were held, and the ruin of Sam accomplished.

"That is the whole story, father. Sam is under a glamour. He is a good boy, but he has been hypnotized. These city fellows are very much the same to him that the fabled genii are to the child who reads fairy stories. He will come to himself by and by, but it will never do to treat him harshly, for he is as stubborn as an oak knot, and you will only make him worse."

"To think," cried Lije, "that a son of mine should fall into such disgrace! It's too much to bear!"

But all the same the old man was affected by the recital of Mary.

"Your story is well enough, but where is this thing goin' to stop?" he asked. "Are we to stand it right along?"

"We are going to do all we can to save

him," Mary replied, "and then leave the rest in the hands of the Lord."

"Humph! Things have got to a pretty bad pass when you have to call on the Lord for help. What do you want me to do about it—keep still? Perhaps you'd like me to go to work prayin' too. A good deal better to cut a tough birch rod for him, accordin' to my way of thinkin'."

"I want you to talk to him, father—a man will have more influence than any woman; but you must talk kindly."

"I guess I'll use the English language on him in a way he won't forget," retorted Lije.

"Then you'll spoil everything, and had better leave him to mother and me."

"Yes, an' a lot you could do!"

"You must treat him as you would a sheep that has gone astray and broken its leg."

"Well, I'd just kill the sheep," cried Lije, "an' make mutton of him."

But the family talk did Lije a deal of good.

He didn't know much about handling such an affair with gentleness, but it dimly dawned upon him that Samanthy and Mary had the right of it.

As he went out to the woodpile, he muttered to himself, "There's no understandin' women folks anyway. They'd try to reform the devil if they had a chance. Why, when I come across a stump in my wheat-field, do I sit down an' say, 'Mr. Stump, you know you don't belong here anyway, so please pick yourself up an' get over the fence'? Or do I call on the Lord to pick that stump up an' carry it away? Well, I guess not. I just drill a hole in it, an' put a lot of gunpowder there, and blow the 'tarnal thing to smithereens. But there, they are goin' to try the religious dodge on Sam, an' he'll be wuss off than ever when they get through. I don't believe it; but there isn't any good in resistin' 'em. So let 'em go ahead."

## VI.

### *LIJE FINDS HIS SON.*

FOR a couple of weeks after this family conference Lije seemed to be extremely restless. He was anxious about Sam, for, so far from any improvement, the poor boy was evidently going from bad to worse. The father had remonstrated with him two or three times, but he listened sullenly and without answering a word, then started for the village. The mother had pleaded with him, but he rebuffed her bruskly; and when Mary one morning tried to tell him how matters stood at home, he brushed her aside with an insulting remark about girls who meddle with other people's affairs, and left the house.

The family were driven fairly frantic by the terrible calamity that had come upon them. And why not? There is something a thousand

times worse than death—something in comparison with which death seems to be a trivial incident. What could happen to a mother, a tender-hearted, conscientious, prayerful mother like Samanthy, worse than to see her only son, the pride of her middle life and the hope of her old age, rushing down the steep of dissipation, knowing all the while that he is endowed with splendid qualities, and be powerless to stay his progress?

As for Lije, I think those awful days made him older by ten years. There was a sudden stoop to his shoulders; he went about his work in a dazed sort of way; and if you spoke to him he would look you blankly in the face as though he had not been listening to what you said. There was also a certain drag in his walk, a listlessness of manner, and a far-away expression in his eyes.

Many a time the meal hour passed without a word, as though some magician had struck them all dumb. They ate little and slept little, and

were under constant apprehension. At any unusual noise the old man would start, the goodwife would turn pale, and Mary's eyes would brim with tears.

No one knows the weight of a sorrow like that until he is called upon to bear it, and then he thinks of that passage of Scripture, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." The women found some slight consolation in their religion; but as for Lije, well, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" It was unmitigated and hopeless gloom which surrounded him. Like the old Greeks, he believed in fate and nothing else, and so set his teeth together to bear misfortune with a stout or a defiant heart; but a stout heart under such circumstances is a poor crutch to lean upon, and defiance is only another name for added misery.

One night they were all sitting about the kitchen fire, Samanthy trying to knit, but losing a stitch every now and then, Mary pretending to

read, but constantly losing her place, while Lije let his pipe go out. The clock with a sharp twang struck ten. Lije went to the door "to look out into the night," he said, but in reality to look down the road to see if Sam were coming.

"Father," said Samanthy timidly, "do you know what time it is?"

There was no answer. Perhaps the old man didn't hear her.

"It's long after ten," she continued.

"Yes, I know it, mother."

"Hadn't we better go to bed, Lije?"

He stood there for a minute as though making up his mind. Then he said, with unusual tenderness, "Mother, you an' Mary had better say good-night. There ain't any use in wearin' yourselves out."

Then he came back into the room, and began to put on his coat.

"What's the matter, father?" and Mary went up to him, and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed him.

"I guess there ain't nothin' the matter," he answered, but his voice was broken. The dear old fellow was for a moment like an oak-tree in a tempest. He could stand opposition and not move a muscle; he had had it all his days, and it did not affect him in the least. But when the girl put her arms round his neck, father and daughter understood each other, and he came near breaking down. It was a pathetic picture, but there are many such in our strange human lives.

"What are you puttin' on your coat for?" asked Samanthy, in alarm.

"Sam hasn't come home, has he?" said Lije desperately.

There was silence.

"An' you don't know where he is, do you? or what he is doin'?"

Again silence.

"Well then, I'm goin' to tackle up the horse an' drive down to the village an' find out."

"But, father!" they both cried at once.

"Don't say nothin' "—and there was a harsh determination in his tones—" 'cos it won't do no good. I've stood this sort of thing till I can't stand it any longer. You two folks are wearin' your lives out, an' I'm goin' to put an end to it one way or another. You just keep quiet, an' in an hour or so I'll bring Sam home if I can find him."

He was gone. They could hear his heavy footfalls on the gravel as he strode to the barn, and in less than ten minutes he drove out of the gate. They watched him, for he had a lantern in the wagon, and his last words were, "Don't worry till I come back, folks; I'll bring Sam for sure."

They listened with strained ears until they heard the rumble of the wheels as Lije drove over the bridge at the foot of the hill, and then went back into the lonely and desolate house.

Lonely and desolate indeed! And if mother and daughter fell into each other's arms, tearfully praying that the dear Lord would be with

the boy as He was with the prodigal of other days, and turn his mind from the husks which he was eating to the old home once more, need we think it strange? And as we contemplate that spectacle, the father driving with a heavy heart toward the village, the women weeping and watching in the farm-house, the destiny of a boy hanging in the balance, do we not send our prayers also on a mission to heaven in company with theirs?

For myself, I feel assured that a band of solicitous and helpful angels were about the old man, though he was unconscious of their presence and would have laughed the statement to scorn. The angels, however, do not desert one because he cannot believe in their existence, and in that calm night Lije's mission was looked upon with curious interest in the other world, and many a helping hand was extended which he could not see.

If our religion is anything more than a myth these things are true, and if there is any heaven

at all the loved ones who live there neither forget us nor are neglectful.

The boundary line between the two worlds is merely imaginary. We may not cross it to visit the dear ones, or, rather, we do not yet know whether we can or not, and therefore never do it, but they certainly can cross it to come to us. They came to Christ, as is recorded, in many instances, and I sometimes wonder if even His spirit, bowed down as it was with grief at times, could have borne so heavy a burden if they had not "ministered unto Him." The word "ministered" implies need of help on His part, and the help was sent. May it not be the same with us? Nay, must it not be the same?

But Lije couldn't see them, and did not know that they were there. So he drove on in a very desperate frame of mind, wondering what the next hour would bring forth; he determined, though, to treat his son tenderly, but had made up his mind at the same time to take him home with him at any hazard.

First of all, he drove to the hotel. No one was there except the night-clerk, and he was busy adding up a long column of figures. After a little he said, without looking up, and supposing the comer was a belated guest, "You'll find a candle at the farther end of the hall; good-night!" Then, as the supposed guest did not move, he looked up, and, recognizing Lije, exclaimed, "Hullo, Mr. Tomkins! I thought it was some one else. Aren't you out late? What's the matter? Anybody sick? Can I do anything for you?"

Lije didn't know how to say what he wanted to say. If he asked directly for information concerning Sam there would be an implication of something having gone wrong with the boy, and he wouldn't admit that to a stranger for worlds. So he replied:

"No, nothin' the matter, I guess. Family as well as usual. Don't need any doctors up our way. I was just drivin' home, an' thought I'd

call an' save Sam a long walk, that's all. I rather guessed he'd be here."

The clerk thought a minute. It made no difference to him where Sam was or what might become of him. He was simply clerk in a hotel, and everything outside the hotel might take care of itself.

"No, Mr. Tomkins, I haven't seen Sam tonight. Don't believe he's upstairs with the other fellows, for I haven't heard any racket. You'd better try down to Bob's; he's most likely there."

So Lije turned and went out without even saying "Thank you." "Bob's!" he exclaimed. "That's a queer place for my son Sam, for sure. Why, Bob keeps a liquor-hole, the wust place in town, an' I reckon a good many of the mill hands have started downhill from his bar. An' they do say that gamblin' is goin' on there every night. An' my son Sam is there? Don't believe it could be much wuss than that."

How still and quiet the village was! It was close upon midnight, and nearly every light was out. The villagers lived up to the old rule about early to bed and early to rise, and by ten o'clock generally were between the sheets; but there was one house that had not closed—"Bob's." Thitherward Lije wended his way. It was just round the corner, not forty rods from the hotel, and when Lije came in sight of it he heard uproarious laughter coming from the upper rooms, and his heart sank. As he stood for a moment after tying the horse, he muttered to himself, "I've never believed in any hell, but 'pears to me I'm pretty close to one now, an'"—he clenched his fists—"if Sam is there I'll fetch him out."

He opened the door of the saloon and stepped boldly in. It was the first time he had ever been in such a place, for he was very strict in his habits and had lived an entirely temperate life. The barkeeper knew him because it was his business to know everybody, but, suspecting that something had gone wrong, did not give

him a very cordial welcome. There were half a dozen men of the baser sort seated round the stove, most of them in a maudlin state.

"Well, farmer," said Bob, as soon as he recovered from his surprise, "what can I do for you? You won't have a glass of warm whisky, eh? I can make you a punch that will drink itself; what do you say?"

Lije paid no attention to the offer, but said quietly, "I was to meet Sam an' take him home. He isn't here?"

"Well, farmer, if you and he have any agreement between you, I guess you'll find him upstairs. From the noise I judge the meeting hasn't broke up yet. Just take the door to the right, and after that you'll find your own way."

Lije was as stern as a shaft of granite; but there was a volcano inside of him which it would have been dangerous to tamper with. One of the group about the stove attempted to make a joke, but Lije looked at him—merely looked at him, and said nothing, and the fellow hushed at

once. Then he strode across the saloon, opened the door indicated, and went upstairs.

There was a sound of revelry which guided him. Songs of rather doubtful character were being sung in chorus, but the voices were thick and husky. The door was ajar, but Lije pushed it wide open with his foot and walked into the room. The sight was appalling. The three young men were seated at the table, on which were two empty whisky-bottles. The air was redolent of mingled liquor and tobacco smoke, and a very lively game, which Lije afterward learned was poker, was in progress. Sam's back was toward the door, and of course he did not see his father, and, moreover, he was in such a befuddled condition that he didn't even hear the intruding footsteps.

For perhaps a minute Lije stood there, and so absorbed were the players that they didn't notice his presence.

"Hullo! there's nothing in the bottle," cried one. "No, no, you won't play until we send

down for something to drink. I've got a powerful thirst on me to-night."

"Go ahead with you, Sam," cried the other; "it's your lead, and I'm going to get your pile before you go home, mind that!"

"Sam will not throw a card down till I get my whisky," exclaimed the first speaker. "Here, Jim," mistaking Lije for the barkeeper's attendant, "fetch up one more, and charge it to Sam. I guess he can afford to pay for it to-night, for he's pretty well cleaned us both out. Why," and he shook the bottle, "here's enough for a couple of swallows. I'll toss up to see who shall have it."

Just then he looked up and caught sight of Lije. "Well, old man," he sang out, "glad to see you. Sit right down and take a hand. Where did you come from anyhow, and who are you? Don't know you, but glad to see you; take a drink," and he turned the whisky into a tumbler, rose unsteadily, caught Lije by the arm with the familiarity of a drunken man, and tried to put the liquor to his lips.

Lije at that moment resembled my idea of one of the prophets of Israel when a storm of anger swept over him. He could hardly remember what happened when he spoke to me of this incident a year afterward, for, as he said, it all occurred so quickly, and he was in such a state of fury, that there wasn't time for it to make any impression on his mind except after the manner of a dream. But there are certain details which I have reason to believe are true.

When the man offered him the tumbler Lije made a motion which was intended to simply brush the fellow aside; but there must have been more energy in his arm than he knew of, for the man staggered across the room backward, trying at every step to recover himself, and then fell in a heap on the floor. Angered beyond control at his repulse, and partly sobered, he regained his feet, grasped one of the empty bottles, and made a vicious blow at the farmer's head. Lije was, however, too quick for him. The bottle flew out of the fellow's hands, and, hitting the

stove, was smashed into a thousand pieces. Quick as thought, Lije grasped him by the collar with one hand and by the leg with the other, and literally hurled him down that flight of stairs. Lije declares that he doesn't recall the fact very vividly, but admits that he grappled with the man, and that something happened immediately. The man himself, however, has a more distinct recollection, and entertains no doubt whatever as to the way in which he was treated.

You would think that such an occurrence must needs occupy some little time, but not more than three minutes elapsed between the ascent of Lije to the room and the man's descent from it.

Sam heard the tussle, but for an instant thought nothing of it. Then, slowly turning to see what the fuss was about, he caught sight of his father, whose blazing eyes were fixed on his boy's face. Sam's soul got the mastery over the liquor he had swallowed, temporarily at least, and, springing to his feet, he cried:

"My God! Father, where did you come from?"

The voice was full of anguish, and so affected was Lije by it that his whole mood changed; he lost his anger, and in its stead was a profound pity for that poor lad who had gone so far astray.

"I came from the farm, Sam," he said, in quiet tones, "and I want you to go home with me."

"Can't go home as I am now," Sam replied, as the liquor once more asserted itself; "can't think of presenting myself in this condition to the women folks. Sleep here to-night, and I'll go up home in the morning."

Of course I can't give his exact words, for they were terribly tangled and were uttered with spasmodic effort, but that is what he tried to say.

The father, however, would listen to nothing of the kind, and after half an hour, by dint of force and tenderness, of mingled coaxing and threats, Sam was hoisted into the wagon and Lije began the sad journey home.

The father said not a word during that long

ride. Sam tried once or twice to ask a question in his maudlin way, but Lije answered nothing. If you could have seen his face, stern and yet pitiful, you would not have forgotten it, I am sure. At last Sam saw that it was vain to try to draw the farmer out, and saying, half under his breath, "Don't seem to be talking much, do you?" he also relapsed into silence. So Lije, busy with some of the most terrible thoughts that ever agonized a human mind, drove on in the dark night, a few stars shining on his way and the clouds scurrying along in the frosty sky.

As Lije helped Sam up the narrow staircase to his bedroom the women stood together in the parlor door, pale, tearful, and trembling. It was as though some one were bearing a dead body to the second floor. They clung to each other convulsively for mutual support, and when the last footfalls died away they took their places on the sofa to wait the father's return.

It was a full half-hour before he came down. He felt the situation too deeply for words, and

so gave no account of what had occurred. At length Mary, in a half-whisper, said:

"Father!"

"Well, darter, what is it?"

"You don't believe in God, dear, but after all it's possible that there is one."

He turned his face toward her with an inquiring look.

"And if there should be one, as mother and I believe there is, He knows how our hearts are breaking about Sam."

Lije remained silent.

"And it would do no harm, father, if before we go to bed we just kneel down and pray to Him to help us bear our trouble and to help Sam to become a man again. You won't say no, father, will you?"

"Do what you please," he answered brokenly; "it's all beyond me. I don't know nothin' about nothin'."

And in that little best room Mary and her mother knelt, and, be it confessed, Lije knelt too,

and, burying his hard face in his hard hands, gave forth a great sob, such a sob as only despair and utter helplessness can furnish.

Mary prayed. It was only a short prayer, but how much of pleading was in it! She spoke to God as though He was nigh at hand, and her simple language was full of trust and confidence in that Power which can accomplish all things.

As they rose the old man's eyes were wet. The reaction had come, and he was as weak as a child.

When Mary kissed him he said tremblingly, "Darter, you are an angel if ever there was one. Good-night, dear girl, good-night. Come, mother, we must go to bed."

## VII.

*THE NEXT MORNING.*

THE next morning the farmer was up at the usual time, four o'clock. The breakfast hour was six-thirty, and as the little family sat down Sam's vacant chair spoke volumes. Of course there had been very little sleep on the part of any one except that of the boy, who slept heavily and stertorously.

After breakfast Lije gave the three hands their stint for the day. He didn't want them about the house at that particular juncture of affairs, and so sent one to cut wood in a distant part of the farm, another to a neighbor who was putting up a barn, and the third with the ox-team to the grist-mill seven miles away.

I think that with the morning the old hard

feeling came back into his heart. He couldn't understand how a boy of his could yield to such a temptation. Having an iron will, it was impossible for him to appreciate the position in which Sam found himself. Besides, there were the mother and daughter. How they were suffering! He didn't think of his own misery, the agony he was passing through—we must give him full credit for that—but the women folks, he thought, had more than they could bear, and he was almost convinced that harsh measures were absolutely necessary. It was in his mind to tell Sam plainly that he must either stop at once and go back to his farm work or leave the house and find some employment elsewhere.

My own feeling is that the ideal man is half woman. That is to say, he must have a sympathetic side to his character as well as a stern side. But Lije had only the latter. He had fought his way in the world, had been very saving all his days, had denied himself many comforts in order to get the farm free from debt and

lay up a moiety for his old age, and the process, as is always the case, eliminated the tender feelings he naturally possessed, and made him cold and unable to see why others should fail where he had held his own.

Moreover, he was to a certain extent ostracized on account of his religious opinions, and that made him at times terribly bitter. We haven't reached the millennium of charity yet, and it is hard to feel that there isn't something wrong about a man who differs radically from us in his opinions. We can't quite believe that he is honest; at any rate, there is an impression that there is moral turpitude connected with heterodoxy. Lije felt this, and, although his neighbors were neighborly to a certain extent, there was a mysterious something in their bearing which angered him.

So he couldn't even tell himself how he would treat Sam when they met. He would face the boy with his disgrace and put the matter plainly before him without flinching, but his course after

that would depend on the way Sam took it and what he proposed to do.

It was nine o'clock before the boy made his appearance, and it was evident that he was conscious of his guilt and felt humiliated by it.

"Good-morning, Sam," said Mary, as he opened the kitchen door; "are you ready for your breakfast?"

"Rather late, I guess," he answered, in a doleful voice.

"That's no matter; I can have you a nice cup of coffee in two minutes, and mother'll fry the buckwheats in two minutes more. Sit right down."

But it was terribly hard work for any one of the three to be cheerful.

"Don't know how I came to oversleep myself. Can't remember much of what happened last night, but I must have been in a pretty bad condition, I reckon."

He forced a laugh, but there was no good cheer in it.

"Where's father?" he asked, with some timidity.

"Doin' the chores, dear," replied the mother; and she added, unfortunately and because she really didn't know what to say, "shall I call him?"

"For heaven's sake, no," broke forth Sam. "I haven't much appetite, you see. Don't trouble about the cakes, mother; this cup of coffee is all I want. I'm kind of nervous and unstrung, and perhaps it will brace me up." He gulped down the coffee, and said, "Now I'll go up to my room for a while and lie down."

As he passed out he turned to his mother. "If father wants to see me, as I suppose he will, you can tell him where I am," and he disappeared.

Do you know I have a very tender spot in my nature for a fellow like Sam? I don't believe that even a mother can feel as badly about a boy who has gone wrong as the boy feels about himself. When Sam went upstairs he despised

and hated himself. I am not sure that he wouldn't have got away with himself if the fatal drug had been at hand. The sufferings of a man who has yielded to drink and lost his self-control and self-respect are something terrible, and when Sam sat down on the edge of the bed he looked the very picture of despair.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" Sam recognized that knock, and put his teeth firmly together.

Lije entered, took his seat on the opposite side of the room, and for a minute looked at the boy without saying a word.

"Well, father, I've been expecting you, and I suppose you've come to handle me roughly."

"Don't you deserve it?"

"Yes, I guess I do."

"You have dishonored a respectable family, an' ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I reckon most folks would say so, and especially mother and Mary; but I can't see why you should."

"I, Sam! what do you mean? Can't I see that you are spoilin' your life?"

"Yes, perhaps you do; but what of it? My life is mine, isn't it? And can't I do what I please with my own?"

"But you are bringin' the whole family to sorrow, boy."

"What of that, father? Why need they worry about me? Let them live their own lives in their own way, and let me live mine in my own way. I don't see why I should do what they want me to do, especially as I don't ask them to do what I want to do."

The old man became excited at this point. He was dumfounded at the audacity of the boy, and yet it was plain that Sam was thinking along certain lines which appeared to him to be justifiable. In other words, he didn't talk for the purpose of excusing himself, but for the higher purpose of defending himself. Lije was on his feet, and his eyes blazed with unconcealed astonishment.

"Suppose I do drink and suppose I do gamble, whose business is it except my own?" cried Sam, in desperation.

"Have you thought of the consequences, Sam? You'll ruin your constitution."

"All right; it's my constitution, not yours."

"You'll break yourself all up, boy, an' in ten years you'll be in your grave."

"Without doubt, father. Everybody must die sometime, and what are a few years more or less anyhow? Life isn't worth so much to me that I care to take special care of it. While I do live I might as well make a merry time of it, and when the end comes, why, let it come. I don't care."

"Look here, Sam, what's happened to you? You didn't use to talk in this nonsensical way."

"It's not nonsensical, father; it is philosophical."

"Well, you beat me, Sam. I don't see where you got them idees. Just see, boy, what there is in your futur', if you behave yourself."

"Won't you tell me, father, for I confess I don't know?"

Sam went to the window and looked out; but nothing that he saw interested him, neither the sky nor the fields nor the flowing river in the distance. He was entirely occupied with his own gloomy thoughts.

"Don't you know, Sam, without my tellin' you? Your mother an' I won't live long; in the course of natur' we can't; then the farm is yours to carry on. There's an honorable an' a profitable life before you, an', I don't doubt, a great deal of happiness, if you don't fling it away."

"You draw a pretty picture, father; but I don't think I like it."

"An' you've got the prospect of marryin' the prettiest girl in the village an' havin' a family of your own."

"No, I haven't," snapped Sam, as he turned and faced his father, with a strange look on his face.

"You haven't? Why not?"

"Because she's given me up."

"Sophy Perkins given you up?"

"Yes; last week, and she did right too. I don't blame her a bit. Now then, what is there for me to live for? All this beautiful picture you draw is mere stuff."

"You don't mean it, Sam," and there was a gleam of pity in Lije's eyes.

"Yes, I'm sacked." Sam ran his hands into his pockets, and flushed crimson.

"I guess we must see about that," retorted Lije. "But then, I s'pose—"

"And you will suppose correctly, father. There is no reason why she should marry a drunkard that I know of, and I'm pretty nigh to one, I guess. But who cares? What incentive have I to lead what you call an exemplary life? Do you know of any?"

"What kind of thinkin', Sam, have you been doin', I'd like to know, to lead you astray like that? Have the fellows you've been asso-

ciatin' with put that kind of reasonin' into your head?"

"No; we haven't discussed the subject," remarked Sam very doggedly.

"Where did you get it then—tell me that?"

"Why, to be entirely frank, I got it from you, father."

"Me? Me, Sam? Are you crazy? Did I ever gamble or drink? Haven't I been economical an' reg'lar all my life?"

"Yes, you have; but it's been in spite of your belief, father. Now listen to me, and I'll tell you something you don't know, but something it is time you did know. Let us talk squarely, father. How was I brought up? Like other boys?"

"Why, Sam—"

"Now don't interrupt me. I've waited a good while to have my say, and I'm going to have it. After that you can turn me out of the house if you see fit. I know what you have been thinking about, father, and I'll pack up if you

say so, and go to the city or go to the devil or both; it makes mighty little difference to me."

Lije grew pale. There was something on his son's mind, and he didn't like the looks of it. I think he trembled; possibly there was fear in his heart, for it was evident that this was no mere outburst of passion on the boy's part.

"Did you teach me as a youngster to believe in God? On the other hand, you told me there isn't one. I have noticed that the people who believe in God have something or other in their lives that restrains them. You needn't look twice to see that. What it is I don't know, but it's something. Now I never had that; so I reasoned that if there is no God then there's no obligation to do as He wants me to do. I am left to go my own way, and if things don't turn out well it's my fault, and if I want to pursue a certain course and take the consequences, why shouldn't I? There is nobody to reckon with, nobody to bring me to account, so I do as I please."

"Hold up, Sam—"

"I will not, father. Wait till I've done, and then you can talk as long as you please. You taught me that what is called religion is a pack of lies, and that most of the folks who accept it are fools. All right. I haven't got any religion, and here I am. It's not my fault, it's yours; and if I'm not what you wish me to be you have yourself to blame; for if there isn't any God and if there isn't any religion and if there isn't any hereafter, why shouldn't I gratify every appetite and passion? Why shouldn't I get what I can, and keep what I get? And if I want to make a joke of my life, what's to hinder?"

"But your honor, Sam, your honor, boy!"

"Honor! What's honor but a name? Why should I be honorable if I don't think it pays or if I wish to do something dishonorable? Honor is mere folderol. You have taught me that I am to die a dog's death; then why shouldn't I live a dog's life if it pleases me? Suppose I love somebody? Why, love is a mere convenience,

a sort of luxury to make me comfortable; and if I don't care to be comfortable that way is there any reason why I should be loyal to that love? At best it's a merely temporary matter, and when I get killed—bah! that's the end of the love and the end of me. Come now, father, I put it to you; is there anything in that theory which will restrain me, or make me sacrifice for the good of others, or induce me to lead a moral life? So far as I can see, if there's nothing beyond and nobody up above to care whether there's a beyond or not, why should I bother myself? If I want a thing I'm going to have it; and if I find more pleasure in whisky than in attending to the farm, then why shouldn't I take the whisky? Here I am a half-made drunkard, and I tell you plainly that I am what I am because you brought me up to disbelieve everything that other people who lead moral lives hold dear. That's the simple fact, and I don't see why I shouldn't go on as I have begun. According to your own thinking, you ought to

encourage me to go on and to help me to have a good time in my own way.

"There, father, I've done. Now you can say what you please, and if you want me to clear out and leave the family in peace I'll go at a moment's notice. I don't care what becomes of me, and the sooner the wretched farce is ended the better for all concerned."

Lije was greatly affected by what his son had said. I don't say he was convinced—far from it; but he saw that the boy believed he was in the right. It wouldn't do to threaten him, for he would leave the house that very morning, and as for reasoning with him, that would be a very difficult matter.

Fortunately the father-heart of the man took control of him. He pitied that boy, and was ready to do anything to save him. Acting under this impulse, he went to the window where Sam was standing, put his hand on his shoulder, and in very tremulous but quiet tones said:

"My son, I don't think I can argue this question with you just now. You see, I am taken by surprise, an' have been so troubled lately that I haven't my wits about me."

"That's all right, father; I don't care to argue. You've always told me that it is better to be perfectly frank, and you see I have been."

I wonder if any two men ever suffered as they did at that moment. All anger subsided, and as they stood there, father and son, each was sorry for the other.

"I s'pose I haven't been to you, Sam, all I should have been; but I did the best I knew how."

"Look here, father," and Sam's eyes had tears in them; "I can't stand that. In most respects you've been the best father a fellow ever had. I don't believe there's been a time when you wouldn't have made any sacrifice for me."

"I think so, Sam," and poor Lije was on the point of breaking down.

"And, father, you had strong convictions, and you stood up for them against the odds of the world. But—"

"But what, Sam?"

"Well, I think there must have been a screw loose somewhere in your theory, or I shouldn't be where I am now. I can't blame you, and I don't want to hurt your feelings, but that's the way the matter looks to me."

It was a terrible arraignment, delivered with equal firmness and tenderness. Lije felt it deeply. It stung him like a hornet, and the dear old fellow stood in the presence of the boy, the very picture of despair. He cried in anguish, "Sam, that's terrible! I never thought I'd come to that. My God!"

"Father," replied Sam softly, "there isn't any God, so it's useless to appeal to Him. I wish to heaven there were one. If I were only sure that you are wrong, father, and that there is Somebody somewhere who cares a penny about us poor devils who blindly struggle with fate, it

would make a great difference with me. But," and he took the old man's hand in his—"but, father, don't blame yourself, no matter what happens to me. I can drop out of your life and go my own way. I can't stay here and see mother and Mary worrying about me. I'll just pack up and get out, and after a while you'll forget—"

"Sam, Sam, do you know what you are sayin'? Do you think I can let you go, my boy? Aren't your troubles mine, an' won't I stand by you through thick an' thin? The girl may send you off, an' I'm not findin' fault with her for doin' it; but your father won't let you go. I couldn't bear it, Sam; no, I couldn't bear it."

Let us drop the curtain here. There are some scenes which no pen can describe, and this was one of them.

## VIII.

### *A LESSON IN ASTRONOMY.*

ONE evening about a year before he died our old friend, Hiram Golf, was in Jessig's library, mousing among his books. He was vastly interested in a volume of mythology, and one story in particular struck his attention.

"Eureky! I've got it, parson," he exclaimed; "I've got the best thing yet!"

"What is it, Hiram?" asked Jessig, looking up from his writing.

"Don't let me disturb you, parson; I forgot myself for the minute."

"Go on, Hiram; I want to know what you've found."

"It's the secret of the religious life, an' nothin' short."

"Indeed! Well, perhaps you will let me share your discovery. I've been looking after that very thing for a good many years."

"It seems there was a lot of sirens in those old times," continued Hiram, "an' they had partic'larly good voices. They could sing so sweetly that the sailors goin' by forgot to attend to their vessel, an' as a consequence they got shipwrecked. By the way, parson, the same things are goin' on nowadays, I reckon."

"Yes, I've heard that story, Hiram."

"No doubt, no doubt; but here's the application of it. Perhaps you haven't thought of that."

"I can't answer until I know what your application is, my dear friend."

"Naterally not. This man, Ulysses—do I pronounce his name right, parson? Thank'ee, then I'll go ahead; this man, Ulysses, wasn't much of a fellow, I jedge from what the book says. He was so scared for fear they might all yield to temptation that he made his sailors stick wax in their ears—I don't know how they ever

got it out, parson—an' then he told 'em to tie him tight to the mast. In that way he got by this point of land where the sirens was, an' sailed out into deep water. Now that is just like some folks' religion, don't you see?"

"Explain, Hiram."

"Why, it's as plain as a pikestaff. When a man has only half got religion, he's afraid of temptation, an' he must either stuff his ears with wax or bind himself to a mast."

Jessig nodded.

"But one day a passenger named Orpheus was on board. He had a harp or somethin', I forget what, an' he could play on it first-rate. When these sirens began their music he just listened careless like, an' when it was over he said to himself, 'Well, sirens, that'll do very well, for you; but you're only second-rate musicians. Just hear me.' An' he took up his harp an' played so mighty well that the sailors didn't care any more for the sirens' song because they'd rather listen to Orpheus. An' then these sirens

gave up the job of temptin' folks an' drowned themselves."

"Now for the application, Hiram."

"I apply it in this way, parson. When a man has got somethin' inside of him that gives him more pleasure than anythin' the world an' the flesh an' the devil can furnish, then you can turn him loose, for there ain't no danger. If somebody offers me a copper cent an' I've got my pockets full of gold, that man can't tempt me to do anythin' with that cent for his bribe. So when a man has all that God can give in his heart he needn't be afraid of nothin'.

"What you preachers ought to do," continued Hiram, "is to get hold of the poor fellows who have gone astray, an' get 'em interested in somethin' that is better than what they've been havin'. Then you'll preach to some purpose; an' you won't do your best work until you tackle the problem in just that way."

I have an object in relating this incident, as you will soon see.

A day or two after the events of the last chapter Mary and her mother called on Jessig in behalf of Sam. They told their story in such pathetic fashion that Jessig was interested, and at once offered his services in any capacity.

"If we could once get his mind off of these things," said Samanthy, "he might forget all about 'em. He's a good boy at heart, an' must be saved somehow."

"Yes, certainly," and Jessig seemed to be thinking pretty deeply.

"He is very fond of books," added Mary, "and was the first scholar in his class at the academy. If you could have him here in your library for a night or two every week it wouldn't be long before this spasm of drink would be over and he'd become his real self again."

Then it was that Jessig recalled his conversation with Hiram. It came like a flash, and he at once saw his way out of the perplexity.

"I have it! I have it!" he exclaimed. "I'll try an experiment, and I really believe it will

be successful; if Sam has the mettle we'll save him." Jessig was almost hilarious as he said this.

"I've got an idea. No, it's not mine; it was given to me by Hiram Golf. Perhaps, my dear friends, the spirit of that saintly shoemaker is here at this moment, and has reminded me of something he said long ago, which I think has special reference to this case."

About a week later Jessig's plan had matured. He was an amateur astronomer, knew the constellations by name, and was on friendly, not to say familiar, terms with them. His friend, Professor Rand, had charge of an observatory near the city, and offered to loan him at any time a telescope with a three-and-a-half-inch objective. Then Mr. Sloan, who lived during the summer on a hill within easy walking distance, had invited him to make use of his piazza. Everything seemed to be propitious.

Then six little missives were sent, inviting three boys and three girls to meet at the minister's study on a given evening, and the mis-

sives explained that the pastor desired to get up a class in astronomy. Of course Sam received one, and, oddly enough, Sophy Perkins received another. Jessig had heard the particulars of that love-affair, and knew well enough that when a man is to be taken in hand the best helper that can be had is a woman.

But Jessig was very shrewd; for he invited Sophy's brother also, a rather stupid lad, presenting a strong contrast to the others, who had all been to the academy, and three of whom had graduated with honors. But Jessig saw the danger of the situation, and handled it with a good deal of skill. If Sam and Sophy kept apart then the brother would serve a purpose; and if Sam and Sophy came together again then the brother could be easily disposed of.

Sophy showed the letter to her father and mother, and at first they shook their heads. The girl, however, had a good deal of intellectual curiosity, and had taught one term in the district school as an assistant.

"I dunno about this," said the father, when he and the mother were alone. "'Pears to me like playin' with fire. Girls are queer things anyway."

"Our Sophy isn't," replied the mother rather tartly. "She sent Sam about his business without consultin' us, an' I guess she can take care of herself now. She's got a will of her own, an' she wants to go. I think we'd better let her."

So it was decided.

The little meeting was a memorable one. Sophy and Sam sat on opposite sides of the room, and Sam at least was extremely nervous and uneasy. He would give a quick glance at Sophy and then as quickly turn away, his face reddening as though he had committed a crime. Once during the evening their eyes met, and if you had witnessed that incident you would have been assured of two things—that Sophy was as much in love with Sam as ever, and that Sam was about as wretched a human being as can well be conceived.

Jessig, remember, was determined, if possible, to save the boy, and felt convinced that he could do it. He didn't let it appear, but he was really behind the scenes, and took in the situation with the adroitness of an expert.

When they were seated about the table, as he had requested, he said very simply:

"We have a long winter before us, and I thought we might get together once a week for an evening and cheer ourselves up. As for myself, I find my pastoral labors a little dull and monotonous at times, and perhaps you can say the same of your work on the farm and in the house. So when I get tired of one thing I begin to do something else, and find refreshment in the change.

"An aged friend of mine once said that every man should have a vocation and an avocation. By that he meant that every man should do one thing by which he makes his living, and in his leisure hours do something else by way of relief. He was a lawyer with a large practice, and I

once warned him that he would break down unless he let up now and again. He answered, 'Do I look like a man that is breaking down?' and I had to confess that to all appearance he was fresh and hearty. Then he told me his secret. He said, 'I couldn't stand the daily strain on my nerves if I didn't take a day off every week no matter what my engagements are. Saturday is my holiday, and what do you suppose I do, Jessig?' Of course I couldn't guess. 'Well,' he continued, 'I am a lawyer up to Friday night, but on Saturday morning I am a photographer. I take my camera, run out by train or with my team into the country, and tramp all day taking pictures; summer or winter, it makes no difference. My camera is my doctor and my medicine and my delight. I get away from legal perplexities and have a little quiet chat with nature, with hills that are covered with grass or snow, with quiet nooks and exquisite bits of landscape which nobody seems to know anything about except myself. Now if

you will pursue that policy, follow a course of study that will make you forget your clerical cares, it will keep the wrinkles out of your forehead for many a year to come. You must prudently mingle duty with fun, and your whole life will be lighted up.'

"I think he was a very wise man, and I have followed his advice. I didn't care much for photography, but when I was in college one of my intimates was an astronomer, a fellow who has since those days achieved considerable fame, and I acquired a kind of enthusiasm for the science. I don't pretend to anything but the most rudimentary knowledge, and yet even that has afforded me a good deal of pleasure.

"Now if you like my plan we'll study the subject as well as we can together, and by the spring we ought to be able to recognize a good many acquaintances among the constellations. The air is wonderfully pure here, and on a clear night the stars are exceptionally brilliant. What say you?"

There was a general movement among the company, and every head was nodded, as though the scheme struck them very favorably. Tom Perkins also nodded, but it was with a different purpose, for the poor fellow was already half asleep.

"Well, when shall we begin?" asked Jessig.

"Why not begin right now?" asked Will Randall, who took a medal at the academy.

"And where shall we begin?" pursued Jessig. Then he added, "Will you let me suggest that, though our own little solar system occupies only a point in infinite space, still, as it is the most interesting part of the universe to us, it might be well to start with some facts about the Sun? What do you say, Sam?"

After a moment's hesitation, but feeling somewhat honored as well as embarrassed by this personal reference, Sam answered, "I think I am more interested in the Earth than in anything else, because it's nearer home."

"True," said Jessig, "but there wouldn't be

any Earth if it were not for the Sun, and therefore—"

"Well," broke in Will, "if that's so we've got our starting-point settled upon. Tell us why there wouldn't be any Earth, Mr. Jessig."

"The Sun," began the parson, "is the center around which all the planets in our system swing, from little Mercury, which is nearest, to Neptune, which is farthest away. It is possible that there may be other planets beyond Neptune, but they have not been discovered. Since the time of Herschel two outlying planets, Uranus and Neptune, have been added to the list made by our fathers, and by and by some one may discover another. The Sun is the great attracting body, and if it were suddenly blotted out the planets would crumble into bits and fly off into space to become meteors or comets. The Sun holds us together as a system by the enormous influence of gravitation. Let me illustrate."

Jessig took a ring of metal, and to it he at-

tached a string which he tied to his finger. Then with a motion of his hand the ring began to revolve at a distance of three feet.

"What forces the metal to make a circle round my hand at just such a distance?" he inquired.

"The string, of course."

"Now suppose the string were suddenly cut, what then?"

"The iron ring would go through the window," answered Sam.

"Precisely. Well, gravitation is to the planets what the string is to this bit of metal. It keeps them in place. But if the Sun were annihilated what would occur?"

"Something pretty serious for us, I reckon," cried Will. "We should all go to kingdom come in a jiffy."

"Yes," remarked Jessig; "the cold in interstellar space is inconceivable. Langley tells us that the temperature in the infinite void has been estimated as four hundred degrees below zero, and when you remember that mercury will

freeze in the bulb at thirty-nine degrees below zero you can get an indistinct idea of how cold it is up there."

"It is easy to see what would happen then," said Sam, "if the Sun were put out."

"True," responded Jessig; "we should within a month become as solidly frozen as a cube of Arctic ice. So you see without the Sun this Earth would be useless. We are comfortable, however, even at night, because we have an atmosphere encircling us one or two hundred miles deep, and in this atmosphere, which is filled with particles of matter, the heat which the Sun sheds in the daytime is stored.

"The Sun causes the water of the ocean to evaporate and form clouds, which are simply thin water; then the wind blows the clouds over the land, and when they strike a cold stratum of air they condense, and, turning into raindrops, fall upon the sod and make the grass grow. Without the Sun's rays you could have no forests, no rivers, no flowers, no wheat or corn."

"How much heat comes from the Sun?" asked Sophy.

"That is hard to say, Sophy," replied Jessig. "Here is Professor Ball's 'Story of the Heavens,' and in that we are told that 'the Earth can grasp the merest fraction' of it, less than the two-thousand-millionth part of the whole; and then he uses this striking language: 'The sip that a flying swallow takes from a river is as far from exhausting the water in the river as are the planets from using all the heat which streams from the Sun.'"

"Isn't that a great waste of the raw material?" asked Will.

"It would seem so, but perhaps sometime, when we understand the subject better, we shall have a different opinion."

"Tell me," asked Sam, "how big is the Sun? It looks as though it were a flash-light, while the stars are only penny dips."

"That illusion is caused by our nearness to it. In reality, the Sun is not comparatively a large

body. For instance, the little star Arcturus, which you will see next summer in the western sky, looks hardly bigger than a silver half-dollar, but that is in consequence of its distance. It is said to be three thousand times as large as the Sun, and there are other stars which are infinitely bigger than our orb."

"Well, it is rather sizable after all, I take it," said Sam, "and I think we ought to stand up for it if there is going to be any competition."

"How large, Sam, should you think it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Jessig. I remember something about several hundred thousand miles in diameter, but that's all."

"Just think of it," said the parson. "If you should put the Earth at the center of the Sun the Moon could revolve about it just as it does now and not come within a hundred thousand miles of the Sun's circumference."

"Is the thing solid?" asked Will.

"Oh no, and oh yes. As fuel and fire are solid so is the Sun solid. It is a huge bonfire,

sending out its glorious rays to an inconceivable distance. It is not as dense as the Earth, but it is more dense than some of the other planets. Saturn, for instance, is so light that, if it were possible to try the experiment, it would float on water like a piece of pine, and, as Professor Ball says, 'with one fourth of its bulk out of the water.'"

"But what feeds this great furnace?" asked some one.

"That is a very interesting question, and authorities differ somewhat. Ball says that if the Moon were crushed into atoms, and these atoms were showered on the Sun, it would keep the fire going for about a year. The Earth, if similarly crushed and put into the fire, would keep it going for perhaps one hundred years. There are myriads of shooting stars which are caught by the Sun just as a candle catches a moth, and these constitute a fractional supply of fuel. But, you know, the great body of the Sun is gradually contracting, I believe at the rate of some-

thing over two hundred feet per year, which means that a hardening process is going on slowly."

"Hardening?" cried Sam. "Why, then it's only a matter of time before the fire goes out!"

"Quite right," said Jessig, "only a matter of time."

"How long?" asked Will.

"They reckon about ten million years."

"Well, what will happen then?" and Sophy seemed excited.

"Oh, then the end of the whole solar system, and after that, a 'new heaven and a new earth.'"

But I must not go further into detail. The young folks were greatly charmed at the winter's prospect if this evening could be taken as a sample of the discussions, and adjourned to the dining-room, where Mrs. Jessig had prepared a simple repast—a bit of cake and a cup of hot coffee.

When they parted they were in high glee.

But Sam had had only a word with Sophy. As they were putting on their wraps the two collided, and Sam cried, in a broken way, "I didn't mean to—indeed I didn't," and Sophy cheerily replied, "I know you didn't, Sam; it's all right."

Sam's heart was lightened by her voice and her manner, and all the way home he thought of Sophy's face, to the exclusion, I fear, of the Sun and all the other planets.

## IX.

### *SAM AND JESSIG AGREE.*

THAT was a memorable winter. How could it be otherwise with such a teacher and such a subject? The class became intensely interested, and many a night they were to be found on the piazza on the hilltop, looking through the little telescope and through the clear frosty air at stars which seemed to be a blaze of divine glory. They were all thoroughly enthusiastic, and to this day, though that was ten years ago, and the members have homes of their own and children of their own, they refer to that winter as one of the pleasantest experiences of their lives.

After a few weeks the boys and girls became familiar with the constellations and could call them by name. During December their espe-

cial attention was devoted to that wonder of the wintry heavens, Orion, the most conspicuous and the most awe-inspiring of all the many groups.

> "Orion's beams! Orion's beams!
> His star-gemmed belt and shining blade,
> His isles of light, his silvery streams,
> And gloomy gulfs of mystic shade!"

There on the left is the magnificent orb Betelgeuse, and on the right the almost equally bright star Bellatrix, while on the lower edge sweeps Rigel in stately dignity through the heavens. Just above the three stars of lesser magnitude which form the belt is that historic nebula consisting of a thousand worlds perhaps, so far away that it seems like a bit of white wool floating in the air. Not even the Lick telescope can resolve it into its separate atoms, and yet with the little glass which the class used it presented an interesting spectacle.

Jessig remarked that this constellation had excited the wonder of all ages, and quoted from the prophet Amos: "Seek Him that maketh the

seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning." And from Job also, who watched these bright fires from the plains or hills of Palestine: "Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number."

At this time of the year, just after Christmas, Orion was well up in the heavens and could be studied to advantage.

"What is that nebula made of?" asked Will.

"One hardly knows. Perhaps it is a new solar system in process of making, or perhaps it consists of a group of suns, each with its planets, systems like ours. No one can as yet find out."

"What do you mean," asked Sam—"that worlds are being made nowadays?"

"Certainly; why not? The processes of dissolution are constantly going on, and also the evolution of new worlds. You have an instance of decay right above you."

"The Moon?"

"Precisely. The Moon, so to speak, has seen better days. There was a time when it was covered with belching volcanoes, but the fires have all gone out and it is now simply a vast cinder. Of course there can be no life on the Moon any more than there could be on a huge lump of charcoal, for it has no water and no air, and only the heat which the Sun bestows."

During January they made the acquaintance of the stars which precede and follow Orion, beginning with the Pleiades.

"How many stars can you count in that group?" asked Jessig.

After a moment Sophy cried, "I can see eight."

Will thought he could see one more and Sam insisted that he could see ten.

"That is a good test for the eyesight," remarked the parson. "I can see only seven. Your eyes are better than mine, Sam, and apparently the best eyes here, for ten is the largest number that can be seen without a glass."

"How many are there really?" asked Molly Pullman, who was the silent member of the class.

"Well, it is impossible to say. You see eight, Sam sees ten. Galileo had a telescope with an objective hardly larger than the glass in a pair of spectacles, and he managed to get a glimpse of more than forty, while the big telescopes of the present day reveal between six and seven hundred."

"Look here, Mr. Jessig," exclaimed Sam, "it seems to me that there is a good deal more in the universe that we can't see than what we can see."

"Oh yes; we can see very little indeed. I have read, for instance, that with the naked eye we can see not more than three thousand separate stars."

"Three thousand!" exclaimed Molly. "Why look at them! I thought I could see about a million."

"No, Molly, you can't; and if you will spend half an hour in counting you will discover that your estimate is altogether too large."

"Well, with the telescope how many?" asked Will.

"That depends. With a small telescope like this—well, let me think. Professor Ball says that—yes, I recall the figures now—that with a three-inch object-glass you ought to see nearly three hundred and fifty thousand on a good night."

"Great Scott!" cried Sam. "Three thousand with the naked eye, and three hundred and fifty thousand with that little glass! Why, we are pretty nearly blind, aren't we? We don't see much of anything. Now tell me, Mr. Jessig, how many stars can a man see with the best glass in the world?"

"The number is rather startling," answered Jessig. "I shall have to quote from Professor Ball once more. I was looking up that subject this afternoon, and he says that the best telescopes will reveal at least fifty million stars."

"And that number doesn't cover all there are?"

"By no means. No one can place a limit to the number. Space is infinite, that is, illimitable, and throughout all space are stars. It is a wonderful and most majestic subject to think about. But remember one thing more: a star does not mean a planet. There, for instance, just below the Pleiades, is Aldebaran, and there, beyond the belt of Orion, is that almost terrible orb, Sirius. Now these, and for that matter every other star in the heavens, is a sun, the center of a whole system. They have about them probably a larger or smaller group of satellites, just as our Sun has Mercury and Mars and the Earth and Jupiter and so on, only the distance is so great that no telescope will ever fetch them."

"What! every star that I see," exclaimed Will, "is the center of a whole system like ours?"

"Precisely; and some of these systems are much larger than ours, while others are possibly smaller."

And so the time sped on. When February

and March and April came, the old familiar constellations disappeared one by one, sinking so low in the west as to be invisible, and others came into view.

Now Jessig's objective point was not instruction in astronomy, but the reformation of Sam Tomkins. Astronomy was merely incidental; agreeable, even delightful, but purely incidental, the means to an end. And Jessig was a jovial creature, and knew how to be young with the young, a secret of influence which most ministers have not yet learned. There are few men who have tact enough to be boys when occasion requires and still retain their dignity, but Jessig was a master of the art. During that whole winter religion was mentioned only in the most casual way. He preferred to let the scholars draw their own deductions, and to formulate their own ideas as to whether this complicated universe is the result of chance or the workmanship of a Creator.

A bit of gossip came to Jessig's ears one day

which mightily encouraged him. Some one overheard a conversation, and naturally reported it.

Sam, it seems, had been sent to the hotel on a trivial matter of business. On the piazza he was confronted by the two city fellows.

"Well, old boy, what in the world have you been about? We haven't seen your royal countenance for weeks. I thought you were at least dead."

"But you didn't take the trouble to inquire," grunted Sam.

"Where have you been, my dear fellow?"

"Busy."

"Well, we've missed you sadly. Good times we had, didn't we? Come along, old pal, we'll have a drink to celebrate this happy meeting."

"Not much!" replied Sam sturdily.

"What! have you turned milksop, Sam?"

"Not exactly, but I've got something more important to attend to."

"Oh, reformed, have you?" and the speaker broke into a laugh. "Well, I shall try that

myself some day, but not just yet, I reckon. Come along, my dear fellow," and he took Sam by the arm, "and have a swallow in memory of old times."

Sam shook his head. "No, can't do it. Been a fool once, and don't propose to play that game any longer," and he moved away.

When Jessig heard that he said to himself, "Hiram Golf was a very wise man. It is the music of Orpheus which does the business after all. Ulysses had to be tied to the mast, but Sam has learned a song sweeter than anything the sirens can sing. The boy has been saved, and the shoemaker has had a hand in the work."

Two things happened in the spring, just before the class broke up, which I must speak of in detail.

It was an early season, and the farmers were looking their fields over. There was a general movement in the neighborhood, a stir preliminary to the activity which was soon to follow.

Jessig and Sam were frequent companions,

and had become very fond of each other. On a certain occasion when they were on the tramp the parson saw an apple-tree, on the lower branch of which some one who was at work near by had hung his coat. Jessig was prompt to use the incident to find out what state of mind Sam was in; so as they sat for a while astride the fence to rest, he said in jocose vein:

"Hullo, Sam, I didn't know that frock-coats grew on apple-trees."

"Nor I either," replied the boy, with a chuckle. "I wonder whom it belongs to."

"Nobody, I guess," continued the parson; "I rather think it came there by chance."

"Dropped from the sky, perhaps," remarked Sam.

"Come, Sam," and Jessig grew serious, "I'd like to argue with you for five minutes about that coat."

"I don't see much room for argument; but still, if you are hankering to puzzle me, go ahead. I imagine I can stand it."

"Well, to begin with, did you ever see that coat before?"

"Of course not."

"Then suppose I should say to you in all earnestness that it made itself and hung itself up there, what would you answer?"

"Pshaw! I shouldn't think the question was worth an answer. The man who could say that wouldn't have stuff enough in him to make a first-class idiot."

"Yes; but imagine for a moment that I am not an idiot, and that I believe just what I say when I assert that the coat came there of itself, by accident, as it were: how would you go to work to convince me that I was mistaken?"

"Are you in sober earnest, or are you joking?"

"I was never more earnest in my life, Sam, and I want you to proceed with the discussion."

"Well, to start with, I should examine the coat and satisfy myself that it was a real coat."

Jessig nodded.

"Then I should say to you, 'I know the stuff this thing is made of. It was once on a sheep's back.'"

"Yes?"

"Somebody must have sheared that sheep, and carded the wool, and woven it into cloth, and cut out this garment, and sewed it and fitted it for the use to which it has been put."

"Yes?"

"It was evidently intended for a particular purpose, and the man who made it had that purpose in mind when he worked at it. It wasn't intended to cover a horse, because it's not the right shape, and it was intended to cover a man, because there are the arms and the pockets and the buttons and buttonholes."

"You think that good reasoning, Sam, do you?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Jessig. You can't deny my statements, can you?"

"How sure are you that you are not mistaken, and that after all the coat grew on that tree?

What would you wager that some man must have made the coat?"

"Wager? All I've got. I'd risk my life on it."

"Good. Now let me see. As I understand it, you argue in this way: that chance can't have any definite purpose, and if anything is adapted to a definite purpose you are safe in saying that somebody adapted it to that purpose."

"Certainly."

"In other words, it would be safe to say of a type-writing machine, for instance, that matter—that is, iron, brass, wire, and ivory—couldn't possibly have put themselves into that particular shape, but that some one, outside of the materials used, must have first thought out the machine in his mind and then put the iron and brass together in that shape. Is that what you mean, Sam?"

"Yes, exactly, Mr. Jessig."

"And would you apply that principle to everything?"

"What principle?"

"That a machine which accomplishes a given work implies a maker of the machine?"

"I would, assuredly."

"But suppose the machine was a very big one, Sam?"

"Why, the size of the machine doesn't affect the argument, does it?"

"That is for you to say."

"I don't see how it does. On the other hand, I imagine that the bigger the machine the bigger must be the maker of it. If I can say when I examine a jack-knife that somebody must have made it, and made it to be used as a jack-knife, I should certainly say when I see a Corliss engine that somebody planned it and made it. So far as I can see, the bigger the machine the stronger the argument."

"I think you are quite right, Sam. Now suppose you take the next step. We have been studying astronomy all winter. We have seen that infinite space is filled with an infinite num-

ber of worlds. These huge systems are all governed by the same law, the law of attraction, and this law keeps them in their respective places. The heavens are a boundless exposition room, in which the most complicated machinery is exhibited on a large scale. Purpose is evident everywhere. Tell me, Sam, if the type-writing machine can't make itself but must be made, can— "

"Stop right there, Mr. Jessig; I was a little blind at first, but I see now what you have been driving at. I may as well tell you that after the class had met two or three times and we fairly got into the subject I was a good deal bothered. You know that father is a peculiar man, good as gold, and the kindest father in the world; but he has his pet ideas, and I was brought up on them. But when I made that slip—you know what I mean, Mr. Jessig, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, Sam, I know; but it only lasted for a few months, and you've got bravely over it, my friend."

"Yes, Mr. Jessig, I have got over it, and I don't think you need have any fear for me. Well, when I came to think about matters after that experience I saw that you religious people have something or other which holds you back, while I simply had something which pushed me on. It seemed to me at the time that if I was right and you people were all wrong, it would be better for me to adopt your wrong ideas if they would make a man of me than to stick to my own rigid ideas if they were going to make a fool of me."

Jessig sat very still, and listened with all his soul.

"Well, then, up on that piazza where we passed so many evenings it came to me that, after all, this universe must have been arranged and must be directed by what we call brains, and a good deal of them. I couldn't get away from it, and the longer we studied the more convinced I was. I have not mentioned this change of base to father, for—dear old man—he is

awfully set in his opinions; and I haven't said anything to Mary and mother either. This is the first time I've talked about the matter, and you've kind of drawn it out of me. I hope you don't think me weak-minded, Mr. Jessig, in turning right about face in this way."

"Sam," said Jessig, in a voice full of feeling, "if a fellow wakes up to the fact that the road he is traveling is not going to lead him to the place he wants to go to, he is both brave and wise if he turns right about and goes the other way."

Then they resumed their walk, and when they reached Farmer Tomkins's house Lije happened to see them, and in his cheery way hailed the parson and invited him to come in and have supper.

The second incident is equally interesting, and I record it with equal pleasure.

I have already intimated that the estrangement between Sam and Sophy was due entirely to the boy's bad habits. Sophy didn't believe

in marrying a man with the hope of reforming him afterward. She used to say that if a man couldn't control himself as a lover he would never control himself as a husband, and I am inclined to think she was right. That she loved him was beyond question, and that the love was fully returned could not be doubted; but Sophy held herself with entire dignity during the evening sessions, and Sam was too humiliated to attempt any advances. Jessig caught him looking at her now and again as though she were a goddess who had strayed from Olympus, but he maintained a perfectly blank expression, as though he were near-sighted and saw nothing. He also noticed that Sophy eyed Sam very anxiously during the first two months, but after that had settled down into a feeling of security.

One night that little imp of a fellow, Sophy's brother, went to a panoramic show at the town hall, but faithfully promised to call for her at the usual hour of dismissal. Of course he didn't come, and for my part I am very grateful to him.

How to get home was the question, for the other members lived in an opposite direction. Jessig, partly I think by way of jest, said quietly:

"Why, Sophy, Sam will be glad—" but he didn't get any further with the sentence.

"Oh no, no, Mr. Jessig. Please don't; I couldn't possibly allow it."

Her cheeks flushed crimson.

"All right, my dear, I will go with you myself. Just wait till I get my coat from the back room and I'll be ready. I haven't had much exercise to-day, and should like the tramp."

So the parson disappeared.

Sam, however, had been pondering that matter for an hour. He hardly dared to ask her, for if she refused it would be dreadful. And yet she might not refuse. There was a good deal of risk in it, but he concluded to take it.

So it happened that when Jessig disappeared Sam came to the fore.

"Your brother isn't here, Sophy?"

"No; but it's all right, Sam."

"Will you let me see you home, Sophy?"

"Oh, I couldn't trouble you. No, indeed! why, I would as lief as not go alone."

"Possibly; but still it is pleasanter to have company, Sophy," and there was a certain pleading in his tones which was irresistible.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to, Sam," she said, with a kind of desperation.

"Well, of course if you prefer not to have me—"

"It isn't that, Sam. You know well enough —you ought to know—oh dear, I don't know what I'm saying."

"Then"—and he spoke in a whisper—"then say yes, Sophy."

She hesitated an instant.

"If I'm not troubling you too much, Sam."

So it was settled; and when Jessig came back and saw that he wasn't needed he cried out in a jolly voice, "All right, Sam. I see you've cut me out, you rogue. Good-night."

That was the way the reconciliation began.

From that night Sam and Sophy seemed to be pretty nearly on the old terms. They sat side by side during the meetings, and when in April it was announced that they were to be married in the autumn, Jessig said, "Sam is a splendid boy, and will make a splendid man. He only tripped, but didn't fall, and will never stumble again. As for Sophy, well, next to my own wife I think her the prettiest and best girl in the village. They will make a fine couple."

## X.

### *A SLIGHT ACCIDENT.*

YOU have never been chestnutting? Then I am sorry for you, for you have missed one of the most hilarious pleasures of youth.

A picnic in summer is well enough in its way. Boys and girls can have a good time under any circumstances, but the summer picnic has its drawbacks. In the first place, the chances are ten to one that the heat will be scorching and the breeze will die down, leaving most of the company to gasp for breath. I don't know that the sun and wind have any special aversion to such gala-days, but I have noticed that the fires of the one are hotter than ever, as though a big lump of coal had suddenly dropped into the furnace, and that the wind grows sullen and sits in

a corner so still that you would think there could never be a breeze again. Then, in the second place, every created insect seems to become unusually industrious, and, without intending it, of course, does all it can to make the occasion memorably disagreeable.

But chestnutting is a very different affair. The bugs have gone to sleep to dream of spring; the breezes are sharp, crisp, and bracing, and make a peculiar music as they blow through the trees, and, bearing the leaves away, scatter them over the ground; the hardy wild aster still holds its own in purple beauty, and the royal golden-rod nods its resignation to approaching fate.

You needn't start until after the first frost, for that is the magician who splits the burrs wide open, showing the brown treasures within, loosens the stem that holds them to the branches, and drops them one by one into the lap of earth.

There were ten boys and girls, all neighbors

of Farmer Tomkins, who had agreed to make the trip into the woods a dozen miles away at the earliest opportunity, and when that October morning shone it seemed as though it had come straight from heaven. The fields were white with a thin covering of hoar-frost, which quickly melted when the sun peeped at it from the mountain-top over yonder. A tranquil day, "the bridal of the earth and sky," as George Herbert sang two centuries and a half ago. The old elm in front of Lije's cottage, whose branches spread fifty feet each way from the trunk, was as quiet as if every leaf were still asleep, and all nature —sky, clouds, river, and woods—was calm and peaceful, full of benediction. You could hardly look on the scene without saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

The little party got off soon after breakfast—not a city breakfast, but the breakfast of the country. There were two wagon loads of precious humanity in its halcyon days, one driven by Sam

and the other by George, the son of Rastus. Sam and Sophy, you remember, were betrothed, and were to be married a month or so later on. George and Mary, the Mary of the household of Lije, were not exactly engaged, but there was, in the language of the locality, an understanding between them. George had a large heart, and long ago he gave the whole of it to Mary Tomkins.

What a jolly trip that was! The young roisterers made the welkin ring with their merriment, and, as you know if you are in middle life, there is nothing half so wonderful or attractive as the animal spirits of healthy country boys and girls. Such laughter and chaffing and teasing!

Into the woods they went, and then began the scramble for nuts, the rivalry to get the largest measure.

"Oh, how horrid it is!" exclaimed Sally Edwards.

"What is it?" cried Ed, who had been assigned as her partner, "a rattler, a hobgoblin?

Then I'll be 'Jack the Giant-killer,'" and he hurried to her side.

"The burr! Just look at my hand; it's full of the needles. And, ugh! how they hurt!"

It is wonderful how long it took Ed to get all those needles out of Sally's hand. He worked away with untiring energy, and with more patience than the occasion seemed to require, until at last Sally said, "That will do, Ed. Come, let's hurry up and get with the company. Don't you see they've strayed away, and as like as not they have been laughing at us?"

"Well," replied Ed meekly, "if they enjoy themselves in their way, I guess I've had a good time in my way too."

I think there was additional color in Sally's cheeks, but at any rate they rejoined the nutters and were not disturbed by their good-natured twittering.

"Say, Mary," whispered George, "I know a tree that last year was the best bearer of the lot. Will you come?"

"Is it far?"

"No, no, not more than thirty rods from here. It's right on the other side of that hillock. Let's slip away, will you?"

"Yes, George, I'll go; but we'd better tell the rest."

"What! tell them that we've found a bonanza? Don't you do it, Mary."

"Not that; but just say in an offhand way that we are going to prospect. Perhaps, though, it isn't necessary."

So off the couple went, and it was soon evident that George's prediction was correct. It was a huge tree, and the ground was simply covered.

"Isn't it splendid?" cried Mary enthusiastically, and then she added impulsively, "I wish they were all here."

"I don't; you bet I don't," and George's voice showed that he felt wounded.

"Oh dear, I am so unfortunate! I didn't mean what you think I meant, George. I like

to be alone with you, and you know it. You don't want me to keep telling you that, dear boy, do you? I was only thinking that there is enough here for the whole company, and just said impulsively that I wished they were here. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, I suppose I do; but I can tell you one thing, Mary, I'm not as unselfish as you are. I wish there wasn't a human being within a thousand miles of us, and we should have to walk the whole thousand miles together at the rate of a mile a day to get home again."

She couldn't conceal her pleasure at George's ardor, but she crimsoned when he said, "You're a saint, Mary, and sometimes I don't feel worthy to touch you with the tips of my fingers."

"Hush, George," and she put her hand playfully over his mouth; but he simply managed to kiss the hand until she took it away, saying, "I fear you are a naughty boy, George;" and then by an irresistible impulse he caught her in his arms and kissed her lips again and again.

Now let me state, for it is a historic fact, that Mary was not indignant. The relation between the two, a relation of perfect respect and confidence, was such that the liberty which George took was not remarkable. Still, Mary thought it time to end the interview, and said rather pertly, "There! you have done enough for one day, sir; altogether too much, perhaps. Now just go to the top of that hillock and halloo to the others. They might as well gather these chestnuts, for you have done nothing of the kind."

"I've been about better business," replied George, with a chuckle. "Still, I guess you're right, Mary," and in a minute he was on the hillock hallooing at the top of his voice.

The time passed quickly, as it always does when one is pleasantly occupied. And, by the way, do you know what I would have done if I had made the world? I would have so arranged affairs that happiness should seem long and misery should seem short. As it is, the days are

little eternities when we are unhappy, and sundown is miles on miles away; but what little things the days are when you are enjoying yourself! The hours fly like crows, oh, so slowly, if you are suffering, but they go with the speed of humming-birds when you are in such merry mood that you wish they would linger. It's all right as it is, of course, but we cannot help pondering these peculiarities, and wondering why things are just as they are.

About the middle of the afternoon Sam suggested that the party get ready to go home.

"Let's never go home," cried Sally. "We'll turn ourselves into fairies, and build our palace right here."

"I'm willing," muttered Ed under his breath, so that she alone might hear.

"That's all very well," remarked George, "and I'd like to be a first-class fairy myself; but it's going to be a chilly ride over the hills, and we shall be glad to get near the fire by sunset; I think we'd better be off. Come, girls,

pack up your dishes, and we boys will lug the chestnuts."

"You are an old tyrant, George. What an awful husband you'll make some day!" cried Sally, in an assumed pet. "Don't you think so, Mary? I am really greatly troubled about your future," and such a merry laugh followed that all joined in.

They took a different path out of the woods, and after a while came to a brook. It was not more than six or eight feet across, a muddy brook, such as drains a meadow.

"Hullo, what's this?"

"Well, it isn't the Mississippi, I guess."

"Perhaps; but it might as well be if we can't get across it."

"We boys will wade and carry the girls on our backs."

"Let's prospect. Oh, we're all right. Don't you see that log across up there? Hurry up, now."

"No, Ed, you shall not help me," said Sally.

"I believe I could walk on a tight rope, and a little thing like this can't faze me. No, no, you stand aside. I won't take your hand. Do you hear?"

She balanced herself skilfully, and in half a minute was on the other side.

"Why, it's just nothing at all. Try it, girls, all of you. Don't you dare to?"

Sophy made the next attempt, and as there were only half a dozen steps to take she made the passage with ease.

"A country girl who can't cross a brook on a dry log ought to go to the city to live," cried Will.

"You'd better let me take your hand, Mary," George said as her turn came; but she was in high spirits and disdained assistance.

I don't know how it happened—one never knows why accidents occur—but when she reached the middle of the log her foot slipped, and in an instant she was up to her knees in the cold water.

Both George and Sam rushed to her aid, and one of them caught her or she would have fallen; with a laugh, however, she waded ashore.

"How stupid of me!" she exclaimed, with chagrin.

Both feet were soaked, of course, and her dress was very wet.

"Why, it's nothing," she said lightly. "A bath won't hurt me, I imagine."

"Let's go up to the farm-house," suggested Sophy. "You'll dry off in half an hour. I wouldn't take the ride home in clothes wringing wet, Mary. It isn't safe. You'll be sure to catch cold."

"No, I'll do nothing of the kind, girls. I'm perfectly comfortable, I tell you. I rather like it. It's an adventure, you know, just like what we read of in the books. I'm the rescued maiden, all forlorn. How in the world do you suppose I slipped, though? Come along; don't mind me."

When they got into the wagons George

wrapped an extra blanket round Mary to keep off the chill wind.

"I feel like an Indian papoose, George, and you are the 'brave' who takes care of me. There! thank you very much. Oh yes, I'm perfectly comfortable."

"I wish you had gone into the farm-house and stood by the fire for a while."

"Nonsense! Don't worry, you dear boy. I can stand a little water without danger, I guess. Now just get into your seat and start."

They were all jolly during the first part of the drive, but when the sun crept down near the western hilltops on the other side of the Cherokee the air became nipping and the whole party were silent. They had had a hilarious day, and a degree of reaction from the high spirits of the morning was natural.

"All right, Mary?" This from the back seat.

"Yes, I think so; but I shall be glad to get home."

"You are cold, aren't you?" whispered George.

"Just a bit; but please don't tell the others."

"Can't I put another blanket round you? See, here's one."

"No, no; it's only a couple of miles farther, and then I'll toast myself by the fire; but you might drive a little faster, George." Then she broke into a quiet little laugh and said, "I almost think the marrow in my bones is congealing."

When they reached Lije's the other wagon drove by at a sharp trot, and the girls cried, "Good-by, Mary. Had a splendid time, haven't we? A warm supper will do you good."

The mother saw the plight that Mary was in, and at once hurried the child to her room, where she put on a change of clothing and then returned to the kitchen.

"My feet are like ice, mother. I didn't know I could be so cold."

"Yes, I know. There! slip your shoes off an' put your feet right into the oven. The fire

is down, an' you won't find it too hot. No, you mustn't come to the table. I'll bring you your supper, an' then you'll feel better. Before you go to bed I'll make a nice cup of catnip tea with a dash of pennyroyal in it, an' that will set you to rights. Dear me, I wish you hadn't been careless, Mary. You can't do what other girls can."

"I thought I could, mother; but you see I slipped. The log must have been wet."

Lije came in from the barn. "Well, darter, had a good day? Why, what's up? Feet in the oven? Well, the air is nippin', an' I don't wonder."

"She fell off a log into the water," and that was all Samanthy could say, for somehow her heart was heavy.

"Oh well, didn't break nothin', did you? A little water won't do any harm. But you oughtn't to have driv' home without gettin' dried off. I guess a good night's sleep will set you straight, though, Mary," and Lije took his

place at the table and began to tell the news of the day on the farm.

The human system is a very curious and puzzling contrivance. You have noticed, perhaps—if you are the father of a family, you have certainly done so—that sometimes the most trifling accident becomes serious, while at other times what appears to be the most serious accident turns out to be trifling. Why is this so? I confess I don't know anything about it. We seem to be physically a series of doors. When these doors are shut—and no one can tell what shuts them—all sorts of diseases may knock but they can't enter, and a man will go through a thousand perils unscathed. Then again the doors appear to be all open—but what opens them is beyond our ken—and then ailments cross the threshold and we fall on sickness.

Mary felt languid all through that winter. There was nothing specially the matter with her apparently, but she had no enthusiasms. She was heavy and listless, and ordinary duties were

a burden. Worse than all, she became strangely reticent, and that made a great change in the household, for she had always been the life of the family circle. She was depressed, and her eyes lacked the sparkle of other times, as her cheeks lacked their ruddiness.

"I don't believe I'll go to the village to-day, mother."

The mother looked at her, and the unusual pallor nearly broke her heart.

"Don't you think it would do you good to perk up a little, dear? Sam is goin' to try that new colt, an' wants you to go with him."

"Don't ask me, mother; I feel tired. Just see the frost on the window-panes. It must be dreadfully cold outside, and I feel as though I should never be warm again. When the winter is over and the grass gets green I shall be like myself again, but I can't do anything now except sit by the stove."

Samanthy didn't urge her, but as she went about her housework she sighed.

"I'm sorry I can't help you, mother," Mary added. "I guess I'm getting to be a useless sort of creature, and I wonder why." Then she looked out of the window on the drifting snow.

It was a long time before Lije appreciated the difference between the Mary of that time and the Mary of other days. He kept thinking that she had an ordinary cold and would get over it in a little while; but when the holidays had all gone by and she still dreaded to go out of doors he began to think seriously of her condition.

One day when Samanthy and Lije were alone in the kitchen he said:

"Mother, have you noticed Mary lately?"

"Yes, father, I've been noticin' her all along ever sence she came home from that chestnuttin'."

"She looks kinder peeked, don't she?"

"She isn't right well, Lije. I'm gettin' a bit skeered about her. She picks up enough to go to church on pleasant Sundays, but I couldn't coax her to 'tend the sociable last Wednesday.

She always liked to before, but somehow she don't care for nothin' now."

While saying this the mother made herself specially busy with the dough she was kneading, and never once lifted her head to look at Lije.

"Don't seem to me that things are goin' right, father. She don't appear to have anythin' the matter with her, an' yet there must be, or she would take some interest in what's goin' on. When a girl of her age don't take any notice of things it's about time to be lookin' round to find out what you can do."

"'Tisn't love, Samanthy? There hasn't been any trouble between her an' George?"

The mother shook her head. "No, Lije; everythin' is all right in that quarter. I've been watchin', an' George an' she are just the same as ever. It's worse than that."

Lije had scratched a match, but he threw it into the fireplace and forgot to light his pipe.

"Worse than that, Samanthy? Why, what

the dickens do you mean? She isn't really sick, is she?" and Lije was positively alarmed.

"I shouldn't wonder if she was, father. I've been all in a tremble about it for weeks," and as Samanthy wiped her hands on the towel that hung on the door she slyly wiped her eyes also.

"Wall, I declare! I never thought that. Fact is, it didn't seem to be possible for our bright an' high-spirited Mary to get real sick. I s'posed the cold would pass off in a week or two."

"But it didn't, Lije."

"No, that's true, mother; it didn't. But don't you think she's better than she was? Isn't she mendin'?"

Samanthy shook her head.

Poor Lije! It was a revelation to him, and he nearly broke down. For his Mary to be sick, seriously sick, was more than he could bear. So he talked no more, but sat by the fire for an hour, his unlighted pipe in his hand, thinking. The wind blew crisp snowflakes against the window, and soughed mournfully as it swept through

the branches of the elm. He must have a talk with the daughter and find out whatever there was to be found out.

The occasion came before he expected it. Samanthy went over to the nearest neighbor for a little friendly call, and father and daughter sat side by side.

"Mary," he began, "you don't seem to be as pert as you used to be. Is anythin' on your mind, darter?"

"No, father," and her voice was sweet and cheerful, "nothing at all."

"You're not troubled about anythin' that's happened?"

"Not a particle."

"This 'ere cold is pretty stubborn, isn't it?"

This time she merely nodded, as though not caring to continue the conversation.

"I want to see you lively again, Mary, an' full of laugh an' fun."

"I should like to be my old self once more, father, but—"

He looked her steadily in the face, for her answer surprised him.

"But what, darter?"

"We don't control these matters, father. It must be as God wills."

He rested his elbow on the table and his face in his hand.

"Isn't that queer talk, Mary?" and a kind of shiver ran through him.

"No, father, not queer if one has faith, as I have. God decides all these things and does what is best. If He wants me to get well it will be easy to do so; but if He doesn't want me to get well—"

"There, there, darter, I can stand most anythin', but I can't stand that. Don't you go to tell your old father, who loves you more than he can speak of, an' who looks forrard to a happy old age with you smoothin' his way to the grave—don't, Mary, don't tell me anythin' of that kind. What do you think I'm made of, darter? Cast-iron?"

"I don't want to hurt you, father dear," and Mary took his hand in hers, "and I wouldn't do it for worlds if I could help it, but I've felt for some time that I ought to say this to you. It must all be as God wills, not as we will; and I must be ready to meet that will, whatever it may be.

"I'm sicker than you think, father," she added, after a moment, "a good deal sicker. But don't tell mother—yet. It will be time enough for that by and by. You promise me, father, don't you?"

There were tears, great scalding tears in the old man's eyes; but he choked down a sob, and answered, "Yes, yes, I promise, darter, but—" and he trembled in agony.

"Father," continued Mary, "I have known it for some time, and now you know it. There are just three of us who know it, father—you and I and God."

## XI.

### *THE NEED OF FAITH*

I SOMETIMES wonder whether the ministry of a pure life, with its ennobling and inspiring influence, or the ministry of a triumphant death, a death triumphant because the dark path is lighted by an unwavering faith, is the more valuable.

To live grandly, in right royal fashion, to walk through one's experiences with a stately tread and with the courage of a soldier, without fear and without reproach, is to impress upon a thousand youth the nobility of honesty, to give them a high purpose and aim. To die without a tremor of doubt or distrust, to draw aside the veil and walk into the night beyond, or what seems to be the night, with unfaltering step, as

though heaven were close at hand and the soul were eager to reach the other shore—that is certainly one of the sublimest privileges vouchsafed to man. It brings the two worlds closer and makes the other one dearer. Not all may witness such a spectacle, but to the few who do it is as startling as a miracle, something never to be forgotten.

The spring came at last with its warm breezes and its wild-flowers, but Mary, patient, sweet-souled child, could not enjoy it. She had steadily grown weaker, and it was evident that the disease was unwilling to loosen its grasp. When the doctor came one cheery day in May, he spoke of a change of climate, or rather a change of scene, but the sufferer smiled and shook her head. "This is home," she said, "and I can't leave father and mother." He did not attempt to conceal from her her danger, but she showed no surprise. "After all," she remarked—and the doctor has told the story many times since—"after all, what does it matter whether I am here

or there?" and she lifted her eyes to heaven. "I am in God's hands wherever I am, and that ought to satisfy me. I shall be sorry to leave those who have loved me," her lips trembled, "but perhaps I shall be even nearer to them than now."

Lije would steal into the room on tiptoe for fear of awakening her if she happened to be sleeping. He would sit by her side, hold her thin, almost transparent hand in his, and caress her with that tenderness which is the peculiarity of a rough man when his heart is profoundly touched. He would say with forced cheerfulness, "The weather is comin' mild now, darter, an' you'll feel better," but she seldom answered him; she only looked at him, but that look told more than words. He couldn't stand it, and more than once pretended that he had forgotten something, and stole out of the room; and you would find him in the woodshed whittling a pine splinter with all his might.

George called every day, of course. Poor fel-

low, he couldn't always control his feelings; but I must hasten to say that as a general thing he was brave. There was a certain afternoon which he likes to talk to me about whenever I go to Woodbine. "Why," he said, "that afternoon was what made me a man. I was only a boy before."

Mary was lying on the lounge in front of the window, and he was seated on a footstool close to her.

"George," she began, "you love me?"

He lifted her hand to his lips and reverently kissed it.

"If I go away, George, will you still love me?"

He flushed red, but couldn't speak.

"Yes, dear boy, I know what you would say. You needn't say it."

Then his tongue was loosened. "Mary, we were really married when we said we loved each other, really married in the sight of Heaven. We began our life together at that time. You

know me well enough to believe that I can never— "

"Yes," she broke in, "that is what I want you to say. But don't say it, George, unless you are sure you mean it. I would rather have the whole truth, no matter what it may be. You wouldn't deceive me, dear?"

"I have never had but one feeling about it, Mary. Whatever happens makes no difference in our love for each other. You are my wife, and if I lose you I lose all."

"And even if I go away we shall still belong to each other?"

"Just the same as now."

I met George long years afterward, and as we leaned up against a fence chatting with each other I said impulsively, "George, you have never married?"

His face became grave in an instant, and with a voice that was soft and low he answered:

"You don't remember, perhaps. I am married. God married Mary and me the winter be-

fore she died. She is my wife now, and there isn't any room in my life for another love. She is there and I am here, but, do you know, I sometimes feel that she comes here too. Maybe I am wrong in this, but I like to think so. At any rate, I am living in the hope of seeing her, and though I have plenty of work to do I sha'n't be sorry to lay it down and go. Yes, I'm married."

Last March George died, and the loving couple have ever since—I can't entertain a doubt on that subject—been in each other's company. There may be no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven, but there is something much better, for in heaven loved ones come together and will be together forevermore. George and Mary were separated by her death; they have been reunited by his death. Death, therefore, is the best friend George ever had. I am sure he thought so during the years of his mourning; he knows so now.

Was George a rare man? Well, you are as good a judge of that as I. When love is a mat-

ter of earthly convenience, a means to supply domestic comfort, the wife giving her superintendence of the household, and the husband his *quid pro quo* in the shape of sufficient money to supply the necessaries of life, then love is more or less of a bargain, and when one partner dies the survivor looks about for a successor. That is a low form of marriage, a purely physical idea, with more or less of selfishness in it.

When, however, love is the union of two souls, including the conjugal relation but not at all dependent upon it, a union that has its basis in that subtle and indescribable something which is the strongest element in the nature of God Himself, then when a man marries he is married for eternity as well as for time. Those souls travel together along life's highway in mutual helpfulness and sympathy, and when the parting comes the one who goes waits patiently for the one who is coming, and the one who is left waits patiently for the time to go. That is marriage indeed, ennobling, inspiring, and glorious. I do not

know enough of the world to declare that there are many such marriages, but I am certain that there are some. George and Mary were married in that way.

When Lije realized the fact that he must lose Mary he was the most pitiable object I ever saw. At times he would summon all the stubbornness of his nature and try to bear it, but there were other times when his self-control slipped away, and then he was perfectly frantic. That the calamity was evidence of cruelty, he had no doubt; but whom could he blame? Who was responsible for it? He didn't believe in God, and so of course could not see any purpose, either beneficent or otherwise; and as for the laws of nature, they were both impersonal and inexorable. He could say nothing, could do nothing, was absolutely helpless, like a man on an avalanche, who is being carried to destruction.

In the field one day he saw under the fence a wild-flower tossing its golden petals in the wind and drinking in the sunshine. It gave the

passer-by the impression of happiness and contentment. It nodded to him as he approached it, but that made him furious. That anything could be joyful while he was miserable was more than he could bear. That this chance, or law, which constituted his whole creed, should discriminate between him and the flower, giving its beauty to the one and such a burden of misery to the other, that even an accident should so happen that he must weep while the blossom laughed, so enraged him that he gave the flower a kick with his boot and broke it off its stem.

"There!" he exclaimed; "if there ain't no more sense in this universe than to let such things as you grow while I am watchin' over my dyin' child, take that!" and he ground the innocent flower into the sod with his iron heel.

"A pretty sort of a world we are livin' in, anyhow," he continued. "There are them clouds rollin' along as though there wasn't any tears to be shed, and that sky an' that river an' them woods all enjoyin' themselves while I've got

what I can't stand. It isn't any sort of a world at all."

Then he trudged home, and there on her couch lay the daughter, so pale, so wan, so beautiful, and so resigned. She greeted him with a smile, whispered, "You are so good to me, father," and that confused him more than ever. What made her so quiet? Death was perhaps only a few days off, and yet that child was perfectly serene and undisturbed in her mind. He was never so bewildered before; it was all a mystery.

"I'm goin' to see the parson, for it's beyond me. There's somethin' here that I don't get hold of. I've lived sixty year, but I'm beat this time. Maybe he can give me some light. At any rate, it won't do no harm."

When he entered the little library Jessig rose and greeted him very tenderly.

"Mary?" He put the question in that shape because he expected news of her death at any moment.

"Parson," said Lije very sternly, and not

answering the question, "I've come to talk with you."

"I am at your service, Mr. Tomkins."

"You've seen Mary a good many times."

"Yes; she has lived a saintly life, and is dying a saintly death."

That seemed to excite Lije. He rose, his face flushed, his blue eyes ablaze, and, making wild gestures of deprecation, cried:

"Dyin'? What is she dyin' for? Do you think it the square thing for me to be robbed of my only darter? Don't I want her mor'n anybody else can want her? Haven't I been lookin' forrard ever since she was in her cradle to my old age, an' her happily married, an' all of us together? I tell you, parson, I'm bein' robbed. 'Taint nothin' short of robbery to take my child!"

Jessig took in the situation at a glance, and saw that only the most drastic measures would serve the end in view.

"Well, farmer, who has robbed you?"

"I don't know, parson; I swear to you I don't know nothin' about it. I'm all afloat."

"What you call the laws of nature don't seem to come to your rescue, do they?"

"Wall, they don't, parson, that's a fact," and he sank into a chair.

"There ought to be something somewhere that will help a poor fellow to bear such a trial as this; don't you think so?"

"Ought to be? But there isn't; leastwise, I can't see it."

"Why, farmer, I supposed when you and I talked these subjects over, and you told me that you had got hold of the everlasting truth, that what you then called the truth would stand you in good stead at such a time as this."

Lije said nothing, but oh, the expression of despair in his face! Jessig, however, pushed matters still further, just as a physician gives the racking drug as a last resort.

"Excuse me, neighbor, but don't you think there is something wrong in a theory of the uni-

verse which leaves you helpless when you most need help?"

Lije was still silent.

"Suppose there was a rotten plank in the bridge down yonder, and you heard it crack when you drove a load of hay over it, what would you do?"

"If I wasn't a fool, parson, I'd see that the bridge was mended."

"And so mended that it would bear any team that would ever go across it?"

"Yes, parson, I'd make a good job while I was about it."

"So would I, farmer."

"But, parson, we're not talkin' about bridges. I'd like to know—"

"Oh yes, we are, neighbor. And you've been telling me some very important truths about bridge-building."

Poor Lije! he simply moaned.

"And if I had a theory of life," continued Jessig, "that had a weak place in it, a place so

weak that when death came into the house I didn't know what to do with it, I'd be pretty sure that the theory was wrong, and would give it up and get another one."

"You'd have pretty hard huntin', I guess, parson."

"If I were you, neighbor, I shouldn't have to hunt very far."

"You wouldn't, eh? I'd like to know where you'd find it, parson."

"I know some one who would be glad to give it to you."

"Who is that?"

"*Your daughter Mary.*"

There was silence for a little space.

"Farmer, you are face to face with two facts. First, your ideas don't work; second, Mary's do."

There was no answer. Lije was in that state of mind where speech is simply impossible.

Then Jessig rose to the emergency. Standing in front of Lije, and with that impressive-

ness which is the result of strong conviction, he said:

"She believes that above us all is a wise and powerful and beneficent Being whom she calls her Father. As to His nature or His dwelling-place she knows by personal knowledge no more than you do. But He is the great reality in her life. She has a perfect faith in His providence, is absolutely certain that what He does is for the best even though she may not understand it, and submits to the higher will with calm and quiescent resignation.

"The future is not a blank to her. Heaven is as much a place as the earth is. For some reason she is needed there, and she says, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.' She is slowly passing away, but she is more quiet than you are because she believes that it is all right. When in that other world she will meet many who have gone before, and she will still hold to the tenderest relations with those who are left. Her love for you will not be extinguished, but be purer and

sweeter than ever. That you will be visible to her I have no doubt whatever, but that she will be visible to you I do not yet believe. Some time, perhaps, even that may be our privilege. I don't think it an impossibility, but I do think that we are so enveloped in the cloud of this-worldliness that for the present heaven is shut out from view. By and by, when the body becomes of less importance and is less dominating, by and by, when we live more heavenly lives and the soul assumes its rightful control, we shall see the dear ones face to face."

Lije stared at the parson in open-eyed and open-mouthed wonder. Both hands were resting on his knees, but in his upturned face was an expression which no one had ever seen there before. He seemed to enter into Jessig's ideas with enthusiasm. There were great tears on his cheeks, and he trembled like a leaf. If you had seen him at that moment, forgetful of himself, you would have said that that rugged face, sunburnt and furrowed, was really handsome.

Lije was transfigured. His manner was one of humility, and his voice was as gentle as that of a child caressing its mother.

"You really believe all that, parson? Is there anybody in the world who can reasonably believe it? You wouldn't deceive me, would you? I don't want to hear what isn't so. No, not even now, when the shadders are fallin' on my house."

Then Jessig took a chair by the old man's side, and they talked together for a full hour longer. When the interview was over Lije rose to go, but he was a changed man.

"Parson, it's a new line of thinkin' for me. I've always believed in nat'ral law, 'cos there it was right before my eyes."

"Yes, neighbor, and I believe in natural law too, just as much as you do. But you have never seen that if there is a law there must be some one behind the law who made it. You stop at the law, but I take one step further and find the being who decreed the law, and that being must be a law unto himself; in other

words, he must be God. That Being I worship, for His providence is over my whole life, and so sure of His goodness am I that where I cannot understand there I trust, believing that He knows better than I do, and that I shall see that He was right when I get on the other side."

It was evident that Lije was very deeply affected. On his way home he picked up Rastus by the wayside, and the two fell into conversation on religious subjects.

"Don't you think it rather weak for a man to change his views, Rastus, at my time of life?"

"Depends, Lije. If you change 'em for somethin' worse, why, the bargain is a bad one an' you're foolish to make it; but if you get somethin' better I don't see but it's right an' proper to make the swap."

"Wall, that's just where I am, Rastus. I've held to certain idees, as you know, an' I thought they'd last me until my folks druv me to the churchyard. I've been pretty fixed in 'em, haven't I?"

"I've got to say Yes to that, Lije."

"I've been ponderin' 'em of late, an' I find there's a screw loose somewhere. My old theories wobble a good deal, an' fust thing I know I'll have a breakdown. I'd like to avoid that if possible. Now, as to meracles, you know what I've said ag'in an' ag'in."

"Yes, Lije, you haven't been timid in givin' your opinions."

"Wall, I give it up. You see, there's a meracle right to home in my house, an' seein' is believin'."

"You mean Mary, Lije?"

"Exactly. That darter of mine is goin' somewhere very fast, an' 'tisn't strange that I want to know where. She's ready to give up her life. There's everythin' to live for. She's engaged to your boy George, an' there's the two farms to be divided among the children, an' you'd think she'd hang on to life, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Lije, that would be nat'ral."

"Wall, she doesn't, an' that's the meracle.

She isn't afeard, but says if God wants her she ought to go. Death is just nothin' to her, only the messenger who brings the message, an' she's sent back word that she's all ready. I tell you that's a meracle, or about as nigh to one as you'll get in this world."

"That's true, Lije."

"An' then I've been talkin' to the parson all the afternoon. Of course with these things happenin' in my house I couldn't help thinkin' a good deal, but I couldn't make nothin' out of 'em on my theory, so I went down to the parson, an' we've had about the toughest talk you ever heard of. He come onto me like a landslide, an' I must say he didn't mince words with me, but let me have it straight. If what he told me about is religion I want some of it, an' I'm goin' to have it."

Then they drove on in silence for a while. "Tell you what, Rastus, I'm glad Mary's got this kind of religion. What would she do without it? S'posin' she believed just as I did!

Wouldn't it be awful? An' wouldn't it be awful for all the rest of us?"

"Then you wouldn't take it away from her, Lije, an' give her what you've had instead?"

"Would I? Why, it makes me shiver to think of it. Not for worlds, Rastus, not for worlds. You get off here? Wall, glad to see you. Good-by."

## XII.

### *AND SO, THE END.*

I SHALL never forget that day in the latter part of May. It so happened that I was in Woodbine on some business connected with the Phil & Kuhn mills, and was witness to some of the incidents that occurred.

The sun begins to climb pretty high up in the sky at that season of the year, and the hills back of the village were putting on their summer costume. George had gathered early that morning a small bunch of wild violets and half a dozen stalks of the beautiful wood anemone and taken them to the dear one. She lay on the couch, where she could look out on the fields and hills.

There was peace in the home of Lije Tomkins. A tranquillity pervaded the household which

only comes when we have faced a peril and are trying to meet it bravely. The mother had gone to her chamber for a rest after the long night's watching, but with the promise that she should be instantly sent for if any change took place. Sam went about the farm work silently, but managed to keep within calling distance of the house.

Lije was with Mary, and as he gazed on that sweet face, but oh, so pale and wan, he thought of what Jessig had said. He smoothed her pillow and straightened out the bedclothes as though it was a princely privilege to do her the slightest service.

How gentle he was, and what a rough sort of fellow he was! How could a man so rough by nature be so gentle? He touched her finger-tips with his, and when she still slept on he smoothed her hand. There, in a tumbler, was the wood anemone, and on the coverlet were the purple violets, and Lije thought how hard was the lot of George, their plans all broken, their

hopes all gone. They would have been married in a few months, but now—

And she? The doctor said the day before that the end might come at any moment. Jessig had also called, and when he came out of the room he almost sobbed. "I can teach her nothing," he said to Lije; "she knows more than I do, and has had a better teacher than I am. I only hope that I may have the same experience when I am summoned." There are some things which parishioners can teach pastors.

Lije was so overcome by his thoughts that for a moment he went to the window to get a breath of fresh air.

There was a whisper—"Father!"

He turned, and Mary beckoned him to her side.

"What is it, darter? Are you in pain anywhere?"

She shook her head slowly and smiled. "No, I have no pain, and"—she laid her hand on the old man's—"no anxiety."

He answered nothing, but what agony there was in his heart!

"Father, I'm going to the other home to-day. I shall be there before the sun sets. Think of it, father dear, I shall spend to-night in heaven, but 'there shall be no night there.' I shall see Uncle Josh and little Dick—he must be a great boy now."

She grew weary, and closed her eyes. "No night there," she murmured, "'and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'"

After a moment of silence she said, "I am so glad to see you alone just now before I go, father, for I want to tell you something. You have had a lonely life in your thoughts, dear, and I have been sorry for you. But see how happy I am! Do you know, father, what makes me happy? It is my faith in God. I want you to know Him as I do. If once you find Him you will never let Him go."

"Darter," and the old man fairly broke down,

"if you are really goin' I want to tell you that I have already found Him."

"You—have—found—Him?"

And then he told her how he had been thinking during the last few weeks that he might be mistaken in his theories after all, and how he went to Jessig's and laid down his last doubt before he left the house. "An', darter," he said chokingly, "I believe there is a God, an' I'm goin' to live as close to Him as I can. I've reaped only thistles so far, but some one has taken the bars down, an' now I'm goin' to fill the barn with good wheat an' corn."

There was a flush on her cheeks which frightened him, and she began to cough.

She clasped her hands across her bosom and whispered, "Dear Lord Jesus!" then lay so still he thought she had passed away.

Twice her lips moved and she said in a faint voice, "I am so glad! I am so glad!"

After a little she seemed to tremble from head to foot. A shiver went through her whole frame.

"Father!"

"Yes, darter," and his eyes were riveted on her pale face.

"They have come for me! I see them! Look! Can't you see them too?"

She pointed to the other side of the room.

"Who is it, darter?"

"Why! Oh, how beautiful! Shall I look like that?"

The old man was almost panic-stricken. Every muscle stiffened in the mighty effort to control himself.

"Tell me, darter, what you see?"

"It's Uncle Josh, right there over the bureau, and Dick is standing by his side. Dear Dick! you will be glad to have me with you, won't you? And behind them is, is—He's holding His hands out for me. I wonder if it can be—the Lord. Yes, yes, father, it must be. Oh, how I wish you could see them! Look, father, look! and try to see them."

Lije turned his head in the direction indicated,

and for a single moment he was like an aspen leaf in a tornado. Then he cried in a hoarse tone, "My God! My God!" and buried his face in his hands.

After that for perhaps half an hour father and child were silent, her little hand in his, with now and then a gentle pressure.

That Lije caught a glimpse of something I am sure, partly because he has been so reticent about it, and partly because he went back a changed man to his farm work when all was over. On one occasion I tried to lead up to the subject, but he saw my intention afar off, and shook his head kindly but firmly. "Some things," he said, "can be spoken of to any one; other things may be talked about among the few; but there are things that can't be told to nobody, an' that is one of 'em. It's all between Mary an' me."

I think it was close upon noon when the silver bowl began to break.

She said gently, "Father, the hour is come.

I am going," and she raised her hand a few inches that he might kiss it.

At that instant the mother came into the room, and found Lije kneeling by the bedside, his lips on Mary's hand.

"The door opens! I can see it swinging on its hinges. They are all waiting for me. Good-by, mother dear; good-by, father. A little while, and we'll all be together again. Yes—"

There was a faint sound in the throat, and in less time than it takes me to write the fact such a change came over that little body that you felt sure the soul had left it. It was the same body and yet not the same. The difference cannot be put into words, but it was infinite in extent. The moment before death, although she was terribly emaciated, you would have said without hesitation, "That is Mary Tomkins." A single moment after death, if you had looked at her you would have said, "Where has she gone?"

But I must draw the curtain. Lije and Samanthy! The loss was terrible.

I saw Jessig last year, and he told me that Lije was one of his closest friends and stanchest supporters. The affliction had mellowed and enriched his nature. As the Bartlet pear ripens best in the dark rather than in the sunlight, so some souls are at their best when they have been through sore trials.

I took supper with Lije a few weeks ago, and when we were sitting on the veranda in the evening, watching the multitudinous stars, he looked up and said, "Heaven isn't so far off after all, is it?"

Then he added, "Sometimes I think them folks come down to kinder cheer us up when we feel weak or grow old."

I showed some surprise at such sentiments from that quarter, perhaps, for he remarked, "I've led two kinds of life, but I like this last one best."

"What brought about the change, Lije?" I asked.

"Wall, it wasn't nobody but God an' Mary that could do it, but they did it."

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